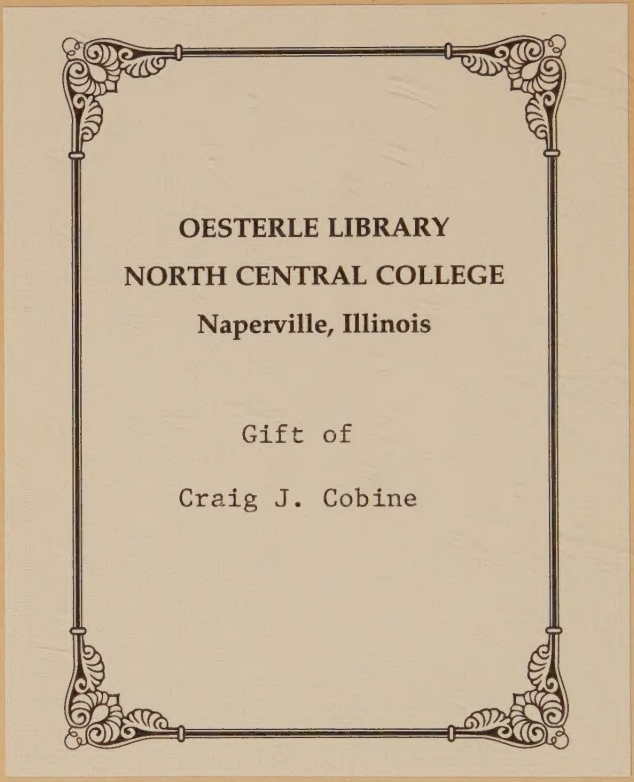
PRIMA DONNA

PITTS SANBORN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PRIMA DONNA

A Novel of the Opera

BY

PITTS SANBORN

VOLUME ONE

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1929

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Una donna soletta, che si gía
Cantando ed iscegliendo fior da fiore,
Ond' era pinta tutta la sua via.
"Deh, bella donna, ch' ai raggi d'amore
Ti scaldi, s' io vo' credere ai sembianti
Che soglion esser testimon del cuore,
Vegnati voglia di trarreti avanti"
Diss' io a lei "verso questa riviera,
Tanto ch' io possa intender che tu cantil"

—PURGATORIO XXVIII

PRIMA DONNA

BOOK I — PHOEBE

CHAPTER I

HELMA SEYMOUR stood in the abandoned oblong of the north parlor. The room was as empty of furnishings as a drained swimming-tank, which the cloudy grey-and-whiteness of its walls suggested.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, Helma, the old mirror is sold with the house."

The strain of the long day's packing quivered in Agnes's voice. Helma watched her sister lay the big hammer on the larger of the two packing-cases, whose covers they had just made fast, and turn away; one more room done. But she had no answer. There was nothing for her to answer. There squatted the cases in defiant solidity, as if ready to oppose the challenge of their unyielding weight and squareness to whatever presumptuous expressman should entertain the idea of carrying them off. They were all that remained of the Seymour north parlor; they and the mirror.

The mirror was palpably there, of the house; no transient ornament or piece of furniture. Like a prophetic eye, enormously lifted, it peered from the northern wall of the big room, against whose cloudy background its own grey frame was scarcely distinguishable. On its low shelf of scalloped marble it rose till it arched up through the scroll-work cornice to the barrier imposed by the ceiling. Like a pool of shadowy water, the accidental cavity which it created in the wall sucked in and turned to darkness the level light of the late September afternoon that traversed the broad western windows, distant half the length of the room from this mel-

ancholy elongation of the mirror and set at bold and bright right angles to it. Yes, the mirror was of the house, beyond any question, and both were gone.

Helma heard the door into the hall close on her sister, and from beyond it now echoed a faint footfall of the older girl as stair by stair she slowly mounted the long flight toward the further packing that awaited her on the floor above. Stairs of a factory or a shop, thought Helma, with a little shudder; no longer house stairs, but, like the parlor floor where she was standing, denuded of the homely carpet which first had been laid down on a day before the girls were born. Those carpets were part of Helma's earliest memories—prevailingly black and red on the stairs and in the hall; prevailingly black and green in the long stretch of the parlor. Only, there it had been a tacked-down rug, gaily crowded with a rout of flowerets and sea-anemones, beyond whose edges plain maroon carpet filled in the space to the base-boards.

"Iron-frame body Brussels, my dear; it isn't made any more." Helma seemed to hear the gentle satisfaction of her mother's tones when, as a child of six (she couldn't have been more than six, she was sure) she had had her first glimpses into the lore of carpetry.

In later years she had wondered at the persistence of body Brussels; certainly it did wear like iron. But why, with the change of custom that touched even the orthodox calm of Byzantium, Ohio, had her parents never discarded their carpets for hardwood floors and unfastened rugs, though for years her mother had spoken of such a change at every spring cleaning? It now came over Helma that she had spoken of it with the wistfulness of a remote desire in her sweet, tired voice, rather than the determination of a present purpose.

And her father, her big, blond-bearded father, she recalled, had one evening removed from his lips his after-dinner pipe, and in his deliberate, faintly condescending way, and with the peculiar low-pitched vibrancy which set his

voice apart from other Byzantine voices, remarked that when the girls had had their education and were "settled" (even *their* parents had not escaped that word of universal currency in Byzantium), it might be time for father and mother to consider the hardwood floors, as well, he added, his eyes a-twinkle, as that long-planned summer trip abroad which should bring back Oriental rugs to dress them.

But the body Brussels had gone on, from spring cleaning to spring cleaning, wearing ever like iron. And in these last months a thought that for years must have lain in Helma's mind had crystallized and become conscious. The father, who to his little girls had seemed so strong and who was so definitely remote in a sort of easy, generous amplitude from the stiffness and narrowness of the orthodox, self-righteous college community, must very well have known that, after all, the measure of his solidity in worldly worth was small. The educating and "settling" of the two girls might easily prove about as much as a scrupulously honest, if not over-zealous, lawyer would ever have attained in Byzantium and its neighborhood, which, for reasons that Helma had never explored to her own satisfaction, he had chosen as the field of his legal endeavors.

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John Theodore Seymour, his daughter was well aware, had been by no means a briefless barrister. Indeed, he had known a measure of prosperity from the day when, in connection with a contested will, he had brought his bride of a few weeks from their birthplace in the hills of western Massachusetts to rectangular, maple-shaded Byzantium, squarely set down in a square Ohio county among geometric plats of level and featureless farm land. What there was about the prim Ohio college town that induced the young New Englander to stay on never became clear to Helma. Perhaps it never was clear to John Theodore himself. The principal business of the college, however, came ultimately into his hands. Still, he had obviously cared more for the

law as an activity of human thought, and for his avocation of letters, than for the opportunities that legal practice offered for the mere assembling of money; and, unlike many another ambitious lawyer of the vicinity, he never even attempted to enter politics.

Was there a tinge of laziness in the very probity of John Theodore? Sometimes Helma almost had asked herself that question. But never quite. Laziness had the tag of ignobility for everybody brought up in Byzantium, and her father must be utterly free from that taint. Into her affection for him—"Helma Seymour idolizes her father," Byzantine gossips found it easy to remark—nothing of the sort could enter. The furthest admission that Helma would make in the privacy of her mind was that her father consciously held himself a little superior to his surroundings. Well, why should he not? But when, quite unprepared by length of years, John Theodore took the final road of all that is flesh, and when, a few weeks later, the gentle, fragile mother, whose life had been only the timid corollary of his, followed him, the two daughters came to know there was reason enough why the hardwood floors and the Eastern rugs had never materialized.

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The loss of her father had come late in Helma's last year in college; and in the weeks that intervened before she lost her mother, the three women faced one another blankly with the question, What was there left?

Not a great deal. To the widow went the homestead, and likewise its mortgage, and to each of the three survivors an insurance policy of two thousand dollars. There was little else—some cash in the bank that barely sufficed for the funeral expenses and just debts; a few hundred wildcat shares that might have meant many thousands, but actually were waste paper. The law library, and perhaps some other books, from a large, but by no means costly, assem-

blage, might bring a hundred dollars more. That was all. Of course the house was there, in the plenitude of its broad and high-ceiled squareness: three spacious floors, crowned with the sloping slate of a Victorian "French roof"; and together with the house the comfortable, if well-worn, furnishings. In a college town, and with the position held by the Seymour family, Mrs. Seymour could, without loss of dignity, rent two or three of her rooms, or perhaps take a professor and his wife to board. She might have to send away her housemaid and do some of the heavier work herself. Still, for her the prospect was by no means dark. She would get along very well.

And the girls? The town gossips, Helma could not but hear, were less sure about the girls. It was true the Episcopal minister had been conspicuously "sweet on" Agnes for a year. Now he would probably come up to the scratch and formally propose. For Agnes, the wise women of Byzantium had not a shadow of a doubt, was just cut out to be a minister's wife—such a conscientious girl, such a sense of duty, always the comfort and reliance of her parents. As for that offish, disdainful Helma (the sanctity of grief afforded no protection from the rumor of the epithets), well, there was her music. Whatever you might think about Helma's manners, you couldn't deny she had a beautiful voice. Professor Spinti had dared to call it a grand opera voice. But even Helma would never venture to bring *that* disgrace on the dear parents, who certainly must have had to make personal sacrifices to educate her so well in languages and have her voice cultivated year after year. Oh, dear, no, never *that!* And, then, probably Spinti exaggerated. Those foreigners do when they get enthusiastic. A church singer; that would be it, and she would be able to take pupils, too. Thus Helma heard her future settled for her by the sewing-circle sibyls of Byzantium.

But the death of Mrs. Seymour, following so soon on her husband's—which did seem like an act of Providence, though

a Providence that Byzantine orthodoxy could not so easily and unanimously fathom—put a new light on everything. In any event, the Episcopal minister marched nobly up to the scratch. His courtship of Agnes became a definite engagement as soon as the funeral rites were well over. He was leaving Byzantium shortly to take charge of a larger parish another thousand miles westward. Agnes would go with him to begin the new life, the new work, out in those sun-browned corn barrens—(at least to Helma their very fertility seemed a barrenness). A Canadian, the Reverend Howard Probbing planned first a holiday of six weeks between cures at the home of his parents near Kingston. Meantime Agnes was to make a little visit to her prospective bridegroom's family, return to Byzantium, settle up the affairs of the house (of course it would be sold or let), and then marry Mr. Probbing quietly on the eve of his departure for the farther West. And so the Seymour homestead would pass into history, a small-town history, forgotten, save by a few old gossips, as soon as the last page had been turned.

But Helma, offish, disdainful Helma—(some charitable persons, she heard from time to time, insisted that she was only shy; and who, they even asked, had really known the girl, save her own people, Professor Spinti, and perhaps two or three of the students?) . . . Of course there was her music. But without her mother, without Agnes!—for nobody assumed for a moment that she would follow Agnes into the land of unending corn. . . Yes, of course there was her music.

Helma, without benefit of gossips, had settled the question for herself out of hand. Or, rather, something deeper, more essential, at once simpler and vastly bigger than herself, had settled it; something which she had at first divined as an aspiration, and then known as a need. Even her genuine grief for her parents lost its intolerable sharpness in a sort of auroral opening of a gate. She was as a novice kneeling before a mysterious portal—a portal that was to lead her into

life—*her* life. Was it the language of the story books which she quoted to herself? No matter. It was *her* language now.

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HELMA was accustomed to hearing that she came by her music "honestly." Her mother, though modestly insisting that she neither played nor sang, certainly "knew her notes" and in familiar hymns could carry the alto part with accuracy. As for Mr. Seymour, he really had something of a voice—enough to entitle him to sing bass in the choir of the Episcopal church before the choristers put on vestments at the instigation of Mr. Probbing's predecessor. The rectorship of that ambitious gentleman had not lasted long. He was suspected of high-church intrigues, which were not smiled upon by the little Episcopal brotherhood of the Byzantium of the eighteen-nineties. It was enough to see the big Congregational majority, backed by its college, preponderant in the town without bringing something of the malodor of prelacy, if not of papacy, upon the struggling church of the Episcopalians. So the ritualistic-tending parson went. But the vestments that he had introduced remained, for, though the Canadian Mr. Probbing was an ardent evangelical, a protestant of protestants, nevertheless he favored a vested choir.

Mr. Seymour, however, declined to don the angelic nighties of that chanting host. Helma, just in her teens, took only the faintest interest in the discussion of church policy, which not seldom was a topic of dinner-table conversation between her parents. But she happened to be present the afternoon the new rector called to dissuade her father from his apostasy with respect to the choir. It was Mr. Probbing's first visit to the Seymour household, and Helma remembered long afterwards his nervous primness as he sat on the edge of one of the least ample and comfortable of the parlor chairs and listened to the master of the house,

never more genially at his ease, it seemed to Helma, as mischievously he explained to the new rector that really that sort of thing didn't go well with the cut of his beard.

Mr. Probbing was very serious in his replies. He tried to argue about the early church fathers and even the high priests of Israel, and when he saw such arguments failing, he had the temerity to suggest the opportuneness of the razor. But Mr. Seymour, who, Helma knew, was enjoying keenly the innocent discomfiture of the over-anxious man of God, replied that he entertained a certain weakness for the adornment under consideration, and proposed to keep it. Thenceforth he sat with his wife and daughters in the family pew and from that discreet distance generously continued to sustain the bass part of the hymns and canticles of Holy Church.

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Mr. Seymour's knowledge of musical literature and history, as of most other matters of the mind and the spirit, was by no means inconsiderable. There is a day when we all learn with a shock that a parent is not the fountain head of knowledge, but Helma, from the time she began to wonder about such things, wondered increasingly at how much her father really did know of an art practised so little in Byzantium outside of church and meeting house. And it was her father who as a matter of fact taught her the first secret of the piano.

"This is middle C," he said, and the pronouncement was momentous.

The little girl in the gingham pinafore was seated on the jiggly stool before the square piano that seemed to her so very big, intent on its keyboard. The high east windows of the parlor were open, and the morning sunlight, sifting through the maple leaves without, imposed its flickering pattern over the static weavings of the body Brussels. Behind her stood her father. She felt his left hand lightly touch her arm. His strong, fair right hand was over the keys and with the forefinger he pressed on one.

"Now, when you sit down to play, always sit in front of middle C."

She remembered that she laughed gleefully and seized the firm white finger in her little fist and tossed it up from the keys. But when she sat down at the piano again, she proudly took the position before middle C.

Her father made no pretense of playing, more than the occasional striking of a chord, tonic, subdominant, dominant, or the picking out of a simple tune with one finger. Business men of Byzantium, the child observed, never played the piano. But another day, not long after the introduction to middle C, her father taught her the notes of the octave. Then one day her mother announced that on Saturday morning Flora Ketcham was coming to give both girls their first music lesson. Agnes took the news sedately, but Helma lived through tremulous days and nights in anticipation of the great event. Within a week after that beginning she proudly played for father and mother a real "piece" eight measures long, with each hand, still to her own wonderment, going differently. Soon after that achievement, she made the acquaintance of black-note accidentals. The following spring Mrs. Seymour treated the ladies of her circle to an afternoon company, and between the chicken salad and the caramel cake the little girls played their duet. Agnes was two years older, but Helma saw with satisfaction in the mirror that her sister wasn't a bit taller. They wore ruffled frocks of the same plaid silk; Helma's hair, curled most carefully and not without pain, hung in a golden mass almost to her waist; Agnes's two mouse-colored braids were sleekly caught up and wound around low on her neck. Agnes sat on the high piano stool and played the treble. A cushion was placed on a chair for Helma, and perched up level with her sister she played the bass. Miss Ketcham had allotted the parts. She said Agnes was perfectly sure, but Helma played with more strength, even if she was younger, and in the bass you needed that.

When Agnes entered high school, she gave up piano les-

sons. Their mother said that Agnes played the piano "enough." Helma was puzzled as to what she meant; Agnes played the "Flower Song" very well, but thirds bothered her and she stopped her Chopin with one waltz. Helma sometimes heard people say that Agnes was so "serious." Weren't serious people supposed to play the piano?

Helma gave up piano lessons when Agnes did. But that was temporary. After New Year's, when the right time came, mother said, she might begin again, but not with Flora Ketcham. The interval was by way of switching over to Mrs. Voigt, recognized as Byzantium's foremost piano teacher. Flora Ketcham was not offended by this parental stratagem. After all, there was no sense in being jealous of Mrs. Voigt. That authority soon spoke in warm terms of Helma's talent and of her ability to have a piece by memory before she had ceased to study it. To be sure, with her teens the acknowledged shyness of the difficult young person sprang to insuperable proportions, and such a thing as playing a piece in public could never be coaxed from her. Nevertheless, the rumor of her progress with her music became town talk, for Mrs. Voigt had no interest in keeping silent. If Helma would practise enough, the story ran, she might perfectly well go on and learn the organ, and then, what with her voice too, she could easily have the choir some day in the Episcopal church.

For almost from infancy Helma sang, and when in the beginning of her freshman year at college she attracted the notice of Professor Spinti, it seemed for a while that she would do nothing *but* sing.

CHAPTER II

Helma began her lessons with Giulio Spinti only after he had already taught singing in Byzantium for quite a number of years. According to a time-honored custom of the Middle West, he, as a music teacher, had as-

sumed automatically the courtesy title of Professor, though he never was even remotely considered as a possible member of the teaching staff of the college. He made no secret of the fact that at some distant period he had been an opera singer in Europe—a *basso buffo*, he expressed it, and the definition was not questioned. Nor did his relation to the theatre, being so far removed in time and place, prevent his getting pupils in Byzantium. From Europe he seemed to have drifted to South America, then to North, teaching singing for his livelihood as he wandered, but he never pointed to any vocal celebrity as his product. He was an elderly man when he came to Byzantium, where a sister, married to an Austrian, kept a little hotel or *Gasthof* that attracted German-Americans and stray travelling men who liked good beer.

His Latin shrewdness told him that the neighborhood of the *Gasthof* was no environment from which to disseminate the gospel of *bel canto* among the pious Byzantines, whose vocal teachers, when they existed at all, had been vague choir singers, who, it is true, had imparted their ignorance at no exorbitant price for the damages. Still, though he promptly took rooms well outside the beery vicinity of the *Gasthof*, he would probably have remained, in spite of that precaution, a struggling and neglected little vendor of singing lessons if Helma and prosperity had not knocked at his door together.

And the despised *Gasthof* was behind it all! When Bertha Crumbacker's parents, German-Americans of the second generation, journeyed to Byzantium from Cincinnati to launch their daughter on her collegiate career, in ignorance or indifference as to possible Byzantine prejudice they put up at the *Gasthof*. There, at the family dinner, they met Spinti and over foamy mugs of the "best beer in Ohio" listened to his beguiling story of other times and other lands. The *Gasthof* in Byzantium was an island of Europe in a mid-Ohio county, and the elder Crumbackers, only one generation away from the Bavarian plateau, sat there in contented response to its vibrant *Gemüthlichkeit*. Before the evening

was over they were convinced that there were no two ways about it, their daughter *must* study singing with Giulio Spinti.

"Come awn, Helma"—the friendly and self-confident Bertha, oblivious of the defensive manœuvres of shyness and offishness, had scraped acquaintance with the younger daughter of the Seymours the very first day of their freshman year—"Come awn over to Spinti's with me. He's the little old professor I'm taking singing lessons from. I told you all about how Paw and Maw ran into him when they came up here to put me in school. And I *must* say that little Dago's a regular wizard. He's a clean old gazabo, too, even if he *is* an Eyetalian. You'll like him right well. . . Don't be silly; come along!"

Helma felt the sensual thickness of the maple leaves that had hushed the wooden sidewalk in a carpet of October splendor under her loitering feet. The sun of mid-afternoon burned through a smoky haze which held the unmistakable aroma of the dying year, but the motionless, heavy air was warm with a lingering memory of August.

"It's Indian summer," she murmured absently, seeming not to heed Bertha's insistent invitation. "I wonder if we're going to have a thunder storm." But within her something the while was weighing pros and cons. Why should she go home and study now? . . . Why? . . . An afternoon like this. . . The last perhaps. . . Bertha held the gate in the picket fence temptingly open. Helma saw that the leaves had gathered in gold and crimson drifts on the grass and the flower-beds which separated the fence from the neat, white, two-storied house.

"Come awn!" urged Bertha. "Professor might hear *you* sing too. I guess you do sing a little, don't you?"

It may have been the undesigned challenge of Bertha's cheerful ignorance that carried the day. Helma went in with her.

The professor greeted Bertha with a cordial shout, but

on seeing behind her a stranger immediately became formal. He led Helma to a rocking chair, swept over her from head to foot one searching and somehow startled glance, and then, without another word, seated himself before the upright piano and began the lesson with a promptness that was almost disconcerting. Helma got no thrill from Bertha's bovine, ordinary alto, whether in the exercises through which her teacher dutifully led her, or in her tentative attack on "Last Night the Nightingale Woke Me." She found herself wondering that a girl who was usually so breezy and self-assured should suddenly turn so ineffectual. But she speedily forgot Bertha in watching the professor.

This spindly little old man, all wrinkled parchment and bristling white hair, seemed a magician, a genie, who had come to inhabit the crewel-work incongruity of a Byzantine front parlor. And his black, ferret-like eyes were continually travelling over from the piano to fix a moment's piercing gaze on Helma. When Bertha's lesson was at last finished, the professor turned deferentially to her companion:

"Da signorina, she sing too? . . . Oh, yes *I* know she sing. . . Com' right over here, younga lady. No be afraid. See, *we* try now."

Drawn by an attraction too strong to resist, Helma went to the piano and did as the old man told her. She had no will of her own: she was the docile instrument of his words and wishes. As from an inexhaustible reservoir she drew her breath and struck out like a born swimmer in the river of tone that inundated the front parlor. Down the keyboard, and then up, Spinti with his fingers, she with her voice, raced neck and neck. He lifted his right hand and beat time with the forefinger; his left hand did arpeggios and unpremeditated figures; always the river of tone was there, now broad and tranquil in its effortless flow, now onrushing like a cataract. Again he planted both hands on the keys and with a tremendous flourish swept her to the heights. . . Halt! He had stopped and wheeled around. His eyes

were fixed as if to run her through. She was silent but not breathless; jubilantly she knew she had breath illimitable . . .

Bertha's alto boomed on the sudden stillness: "Why, Helma, you've certainly got a *perfectly beautiful* voice! . . . and it's huge! . . . It's a regular Niagara Falls! . . . I never *dreamt* of such a thing! . . . When you hit that high note I thought you'd smashed the chandelier! . . . Isn't she a wonder, Professor! . . . Why, I declare I didn't have the *remotest* idea when I brought her here! . . . Helma, 'fess up! You *must* have had lessons before!"

"She taka da lesson now by me," was Spinti's comment, serene in its complete assurance. "You coma back" . . . he declared, as if quietly uttering a certainty. "Wait; jus' when I see you I know you sing. Da eye he tella me befor' da ear. I say, 'If datta girl have just a li'l' bit gift in da t'roat, she sura sing'. . . Look datta steady chin; how it stan' out, ear to ear, *vigoroso*. Da bigga singer dey all have datta chin to hold up da voice. Look datta nose, plenty arch, what I calla da Cremona nose; dat maka vibrate da tone. Den, da broada place in da mask; da mout' open lika da bird". . . He paused, stepped back a pace, closed one eye as if in measurement. Helma, still aglow with the exhilaration of her race against Spinti's flying fingers, could not keep from glancing at Bertha with a nervous giggle. She was absolutely embarrassed, but absolutely fascinated.

"An' you tall, stronga girl," the Italian went on in professional appraisal; "da deepa chest you have . . . stronga . . . stronga lika da younga pony. . . You heara talk about one Adelina Patti? *Greata singer, gran' contatrice!* Youra voice beautiful lika la Patti, and bigger, bigger, much." Helma was really afraid she should shriek at all this. But the sight of Bertha, leaning forward in open-mouthed amazement, smote her with reality. She looked critically at Spinti. He was now leaning back against the piano, his head on one side, his eyes narrowed and focussed for the grand summing up.

"Yes," he said, scarcely above a whisper, but with finality, "you coma taka da lesson by Professor Spinti."

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In spite of this imperative intrusion on scholastic routine, Helma persisted with her college course, more, the consensus of opinion had it, because book-learning came easily to her than for any other discoverable reason. For Spinti, outside of the family, was, after all, so obviously her one real interest and her one real intimate.

Nevertheless, college was not quite so easy a matter for Helma as neighborhood opinion assumed. Languages had attracted her from early childhood, when, behind the woodbine that draped the staunch pillars of the front verandah, father, mother, and the little girls made a merry game of the first syllables of French, and father had them repeat again and again the names of the flowers, and the numbers to count them, and homely objects like chairs and tables. It seemed so funny that eight should be "wheat" and four should be "cat," and that at five she should see a big ship that "sank" in mid-ocean; and it was funny, too, a chair should be a "chaise." Some people called the buggy that old Judge Saunders rode around in a "chaise."

At any rate, her father thought enough of her progress in languages to have her tutored in French and in German the summer before she had entered college. Thus, in her favorite branches, she was already a year ahead of her classmates. And with an insatiable avidity she now read the English poets and novelists, so far as the college library and her father's more desultory collection permitted. But even the small minimum of mathematics and of "science" then required for a degree in Byzantium was a constant reminder that where there is flesh there may be thorns, until in her junior year she finally got rid of those nuisances forever.

It was in her junior year, too, that she really made friends. Offish and even "stuck up" though people called her, Byzantium admitted that she was a real "home girl." Her father,

her mother, the spacious, old-fashioned, comfortable, semi-shabby house still held her at nineteen in the confiding, unquestioning faith of a young child. Even the presence of her sister Agnes never troubled her. Agnes was too much taken up with the routine of the household and the various activities of the town and college to bother unduly about Helma. At home, Helma was gentle and docile, and Agnes, for all her disconcerting literalness of mind, was not malicious. So the benevolent hegemony of father and mother reigned in the Seymour household undisturbed by sisterly rivalry. "Martha and Mary," pious folk said approvingly enough of the sisters. And had not the Master Himself pronounced Mary's the better part? So Helma must be, despite the interdiction of her dreamy aloofness, "all right," as the town bluntly put it. Still, she *was* a little unusual in her attitude, or lack of attitude.

College proved a different matter, and her course was half run before she discovered amongst her companions any, except for the undiscourageable Bertha, that could conceivably be called friends. Persistently she kept away from such mild social occasions as Byzantine manners permitted. Other girls had their beaux. Not Helma Seymour. The naïve and healthy hobbledehoys who played football in the afternoon and led gospel meetings in the evening, both with equal fervor, meant absolutely nothing to her. They might have been creatures of another species. Indeed, they were! It even occurred to her in a vague, unformulated way that there was a strange mental quirk about professors who could talk to classes of Shakespeare and of Keats and then shout lustily "Throw Out The Life Line" at a rally of the Students' Endeavor League. There *must* be something wrong. She did not undertake to say what. After all, in her own home, where her father's shelves were laden with books and the revival spirit was as far away as the devil, nothing of that sort happened. This indifference in the Seymour girls to the noisier demonstrations of religious procedure Byzantium tolerated because of their Episcopalian bringing-up.

The noisy, half-baked, psalm-singing youths were as distant from the magic dream of Helma's daily living as the inhabitants of a different planet.

For it was in a dream she lived, first wholly of her parents and the easy, roomy house she had always known. The big, strong father, the little, gentle mother—they were the gods who were never questioned. And even Agnes, who, she suspected from the beginning, was somehow foreign to her, was still her sister and so entitled with her parents to her love.

With the years, the poets had entered the dream—poets of words and poets of tone. "Opera"; it might be the evil thing some said, but Spinti had planted the word, and its roots had struck to the depth of her life. Now her dream was peopled with other figures, "those far renownèd brides of ancient song" of a modern poet on whom Byzantium singly or collectively did not frown.

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One afternoon in her father's study remained in her memory. Her father appeared to be busy writing at his desk. She was seated in a roomy leathern armchair, midway the flood of sunlight that poured through the big southern window. Her fingers idly turned the pages of a magazine, but her mind was elsewhere, anywhere. Suddenly, apropos of nothing, her father got up, paused at her chair, softly ran his hand over her hair, picked up some strands, let them fall.

"I suppose somewhere the—what shall I call him?—Prince Charming is waiting for you, Helma," he said. Then he went over to the bookshelves and stood for some time fumbling among the black-labelled ranks of law reports. His lips, as he had spoken, curved back from his white, strong teeth, and his voice floated as if in revery, lightly—lightly, but it was not quite gay. His deep eyes looked at nothing in the room.

This man, her father, had been a Prince Charming once,

came as a whisper to Helma in the mellow light. She closed the magazine, put it down on the study table, and quietly, without a word, left the room. His eyes and voice were with her for days.

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It was the only time the father or the mother had approached even distantly the subject of her marrying, though more than once she had heard a passing reference to the future that lay before her sister Agnes. But it was enough to make Helma ponder. Some time she doubtless should marry. Girls in Byzantium nearly always did. And if one didn't marry, well, what then? But she could not entertain so much as the thought of any of the Byzantine men. If the Prince Charming ever took form at all in her imagination, it was really as a fellow of princely bearing, at least a poet or a troubadour, and the chivalric names that glowed from the visionary page were certainly not the Wilbur and Elmer of the farmer boys and the boys with a "calling," and the boys predestined to be city clerks, or, at the very utmost, travelling salesmen, that came to Byzantium for what Byzantium had the innocence or the temerity to term an "education" . . . Further than that the question of marriage (she shrank instinctively from the naked literalness of the word) she left in an abeyance gratefully vague.

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Rumor wove a sort of legend about the Seymours, largely because of Helma, and, small-town-wise, she was never without news of it. She knew she was regarded as offish and proud, and she even heard reports that some of the town worthies declared it was positively shameful that John Theodore Seymour was so ridiculously indulgent of his second daughter. It might be all very well *now*, but beyond a shadow of doubt John Theodore would live to regret his folly. Then some especially sanctimonious person would retort with the Mary and Martha counter.

Nevertheless the Seymour household managed to remain tranquil and untouched. After all, John Theodore, despite his bonhomie, his large-scale geniality among men, was not a person with whom the Byzantines took liberties. The few that had attempted anything of the sort in earlier days had learned their error. One "home" that was not open to prying gaze and neighborly surveillance was the Seymours'. In a community like Byzantium a family that strikes out in that rhythm has speedily either to sink or to swim. John Theodore did not take long to prove to town and gown alike (and at Byzantium they played mainly together) that he and his were of the swimming persuasion. And, then, his Episcopalian connection powerfully, if silently, assisted him. The Congregational majority admitted in a kind of helpless puzzlement that Episcopalians somehow really were different.

CHAPTER III

At the beginning of Helma's junior year in college a youth turned up in the freshman class who was quite unlike anything that Byzantium had received hitherto. Why Winfield Gaines ever came there was immediately a subject of *sotto voce* discussion. His career was brief, though his memory lasted—the perfect example, the perpetual warning. To the run of undergraduate hobbledehoys he was a "Willy boy"; to the more progressive members of the faculty, a "molly-coddle." His ballast on arriving in Byzantium, it soon transpired, consisted not of a football outfit and a testament, but of china dishes and various ornaments for his room, and some volumes—discreetly bound in cloth, it is true—marked Rossetti, Pater, Swinburne, and Arthur Symons. What was even more damaging, there were paper volumes in shameless yellow, and before long it leaked out that Flaubert, Verlaine and Maupassant were among his horrifying authors. For this aston-

ishing boy not only had travelled abroad, but had actually gone to school in France.

There were other trophies of his French sojourn that carried to Byzantium in general a still more pungent meaning than a few suspected authors who were scarcely so much as names to the Byzantines, save for a half dozen members of the college faculty "who knew." His amazed and scandalized landlady whispered it to her friends and sympathizing counsellors that the outlandish pictures he unpacked to put up on his walls included one she'd never seen the likes of herself nor heard anybody tell of—a woman layin' there without a stitch on, just like that! . . . and a black cat, a reg'lar imp of Satan, standin', tail up, at her feet, glarin' at you, and a colored servant girl offerin' her a bouquet, as if flowers was what she needed! . . . Try her best, she couldn't make one thing or another out of it; and the woman was that homely, you couldn't imagine! She vummed she didn't know whether the picture was worse *that* way or the *other* way!

Of course she didn't like to let on she'd even laid her eyes on such a horrid thing, but there'd be other students comin' to visit that boy, and after all it was *her home*, and her own two innocent little children, without their father livin' to protect them now—poor young ones!—that might run in there any time Mr. Gaines was out. So when she was helpin' Mr. Gaines hang his curtains, she just mustered all her strength and spoke right up and asked him, not lookin' at him or at *it*, what it might be, that cat with the two women —he had other pictures of women and cats; every one of the women was homely as a mud fence, but at least *they* wasn't layin' round undressed. She thought Mr. Gaines would guess which one she meant without any trouble. But he answered her somethin' that sounded like "Oil Lamper." She was sure he couldn't have understood, so, bolder now, she says, "No, I mean that picture with the cat and the white girl and the colored girl." And this time Mr. Gaines answers, that decided, "The picture's named 'Oil Lamper.'"

She couldn't figure it any which way; but she didn't think it was best to *ask* him again.

Then there was a little statue he set on the mantelpiece, made out of dirty yellow plaster, or somethin'. It was a woman, too, with a kind of a far-away, dead look, and her arms broke off and her dress slippin' down. She *didn't* ask Mr. Gaines what that was; he might have said a coal scuttler, the young rogue! And, anyhow, she didn't care so much. But the "Oil Lamper," she didn't see *how* she *could* put up with that wicked thing right there in her *home*, even with such a quiet, gentlemanly behavin' young man as Mr. Gaines.

In a day or two the good woman's quandary was over. The "Oil Lamper" had disappeared, and there was no trace of its sinister flaming to be found. A couple of other students had come home with Mr. Gaines the evenin' before, and she had heard loud voices and she thought there was some scufflin'. But you seldom pay attention to anythin' like that when college boys get together. She happened to know one of the fellows was from a Bible school over in Pennsylvania and she wouldn't be a bit surprised if he had attended to the "Oil Lamper" then and there. But of course she didn't like to inquire, and Mr. Gaines didn't say anythin' about it. As for the statue, that stayed on, and after the picture she didn't mind it at all.

Whether or not the suspicions of the landlady were correct, the fate of the "Oil Lamper" remained an unanswered riddle. No one reported that Gaines, save for the solitary occasion of the curtain-hanging, ever alluded to the picture in any fashion, and the Bible student, if he knew the solution, never spoke out. If any other student was privy to the secret, he too kept silent. Everybody in town had soon heard of the picture, but nobody identified it, a state of affairs that interfered not in the least with a general condemnation of the smuggling into Byzantium of evil in the name of art and a general attitude of suspicion and disapproval toward the smuggler. So the most famous picture for Byzantium

since the pilgrimage-provoking visit to Cleveland of "Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion" remained without identity or a believable name!

It was through an attorney in Cleveland, an alumnus of Byzantium College, who was Mr. Seymour's chief legal correspondent in the big city on Lake Erie, that Winfield Gaines had brought with him to the college town an introduction to the Seymour family. Helma remembered the evening of his first call. Her mother, unmistakably a-flutter beneath an exterior composure, came into the sittingroom where she was studying and Agnes was sewing.

"Come, girls," said Mrs. Seymour in a tone that betrayed the effort which her calmness cost her, "there's a freshman here with a letter to your father. Father wants you to meet him."

The girls followed their mother across the hall into the north parlor. A youth who was seated talking to Mr. Seymour stood up promptly and faced them without any of the shifting embarrassment of the usual Byzantine freshmen. He was tall, with a slight stoop of the neck and the head rather than of the shoulders. His thinness bordered on emaciation, and the yellow cast of his fair hair and skin suggested the transparent brightness of light amber. Keen blue eyes, in contrast to a nondescript, sagging mouth, looked out alert and steady from a face otherwise as expressionless as putty. Instinctively, when he parted his lips to speak, Helma sought the corrective of white and even teeth, but the teeth, evidently discolored by smoking, were anything but white, and seemed to have straggled into being in accidental groups.

But what Helma noticed above everything else was the fact that this self-possessed freshman had come to them arrayed in a dinner jacket—a species of masculine apparel absolutely unknown in Byzantium save on the fashion plates of its leading tailor, who, notwithstanding, was never called upon to manufacture one of those pictured garments.

The introductions over, Gaines sat down again and re-

sumed a conversation which continued to be limited almost entirely to Mr. Seymour and himself. He couldn't be more than nineteen, Helma reflected, and there he sat talking of his life in Europe as he might of a summer spent at Put-in-Bay. She could see that her father, though not losing his habit of a gentle irony, was fascinated. And she found pride welling within her that *her* father, who had never travelled abroad, held his own with a quiet authority in converse with this youth who had travelled far and wide and was surely much more at home in Paris than in Byzantium. That came, she saw now, from her father's practice of reading everything.

The hour of the boy's visit lengthened into two, and when he got up to go, it seemed to Helma that he had not been there above ten minutes. She had listened all the while transfixed, her heart beating light and high like a swiftly skimming bird. Not that she was conscious of the slightest effect that he as a human male might have upon her; he was solely the messenger from another world, a world that had seemed an unattainable dream to this girl who, except for a single week as a child at the Chicago Fair, had been no farther from Byzantium than the Lake Erie islands. Now, this evening, in their own parlor she knew the dream as an existing reality, and the joy of the discovery flooded and tingled through all her being. It was with acute satisfaction that she heard John Theodore bid the youth to family dinner the following Sunday (a one o'clock dinner, she reflected, and so no excuse for the unfamiliar coat).

When Mr. Seymour had shut the front door on Gaines, he returned to the parlor and his women-folk. Helma gazed up at him expectant. From one to another he looked, humorously, his eyes narrowing, his cheeks broadening, in a completely amiable smile.

"Well, *that's* the famous Winfield Gaines!" he said at last, adding with just the roguish suspicion of a drawl, "I almost asked him if he wouldn't step into the study and have a whiskey and soda before he went."

"Oh, John!" murmured Mrs. Seymour deprecatingly, as if by some chance either of her daughters might suppose their father serious.

But Helma knew that for all his little joke he took an interest in the extraordinary freshman and by no means disliked him.

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So it came about that Winfield Gaines was a weekly visitor to the Seymour household. His ways with them were frank and pleasant. Somewhere he always managed to pick up a few flowers for Mrs. Seymour. Usually he brought a book to Helma, or a piece of music to try over, though he did not pretend to play the piano well enough to tackle a difficult accompaniment himself. Once it was a volume of Rossetti's poems he gave her, and on the fly-leaf he had written, "To the Blessed Damozel."

"I hesitated between that and 'My Lady Disdain,'" he said, as she was looking at the inscription. "You're too healthy and milk-fed for a Rossetti or a Botticelli, and you haven't lived enough lives yet for a Leonardo, but you do somehow scorn the hand that feeds you, whether you know it or not."

"I do *not*," Helma retorted with spirit, answering the last allegation, "and maybe I know more than you make believe you think I do, Mr. Winfield Gaines! But I don't know much about Botticelli, except that his women all are sour-faced. So you'd better tell me something about *him*."

But banter as she would with Gaines, Helma continually found herself wondering anew at his maturity and self-dependence. It was no member of the faculty, but he, a student, that was teaching her to read with method, and he had that beguiling air, wholly unaccustomed to Byzantium, of being in constant communication with a world outside.

She was not the only member of the family who felt it.

"Really, Addie," Mr. Seymour remarked to his wife at the end of one of Gaines's Sunday visits, "that young fellow

makes me feel like an old fogy. You and I *must* make our grand tour of Europe before many more summers have passed," and his look glanced from the mother to the daughters, challenging an eager "Me too!"

Gaines made no bones to the Seymours about refusing to play football and to attend gospel meetings; required chapel was as much of prescribed religion as he would consent to swallow. For the rest, he reserved the right of private judgment, which Mr. Seymour laughingly declared was his by all the rules of law and logic in a community so militantly protestant as Byzantium. But when he learned that Gaines, indulging a youthful effrontery that he ought to have repressed, had stopped the kindly questioning of a staid professor with the airy assurance that in religion he was a Higher Pantheist, Mr. Seymour kept his amusement to himself.

"Of course the boy hasn't the faintest notion of what a pantheist is, and Tennyson hasn't helped him any," John Theodore told his wife and daughters. "And dear old Dr. Pentateuch, in his way, is just as ignorant, except he's sure it must be something heretical and shocking. But it's a dangerous game joking about doctrine in Byzantium. Gaines is no pantheist. He simply doesn't know what he is. There's a time in adolescence when many men don't, and then they fly the banner of some fantastic creed, or imagine they haven't any belief at all. Gaines was brought up an Episcopalian. What do you say, Addie, to our taking him to church with us Sunday mornings? That might not wholly satisfy our Orthodox brethren, but at least it would stop their gossiping about a dangerous infidel in our midst."

But Gaines politely declined the invitation, and though Mr. Seymour did not appear at all offended by his refusal, Helma divined that her father would be slow to interfere again in what he now spoke of as "Gaines's little religious frolic." She likewise gathered that her father did not regard that particular branch of sport as proof against em-

barrassing consequences. And it was the only sport in which Gaines had taken part while at Byzantium.

When he declined the invitation to go to church, he at the same time gave the Seymours an insight into why he had picked out Byzantium College.

"Much as I should enjoy being with you," he said, punctiliously polite, "I take Sunday mornings to write to the family and to do a lot of little things around my rooms. It is the only time in the week I have for that sort of thing. You know I decided to come here not so much because Grandmother lives in Cleveland, as because I preferred a quiet college where I could do my own work and be myself. My people were all for my going to Harvard, but I was afraid the life there would interfere with what I really want to do. You know most Americans go to college either because their parents send them, or else because in the particular set that they belong to it's the proper thing to do. I'm going because there are definite subjects I want to learn in four years. My parents really were only persuaded away from Harvard because they're staying on in Europe and they imagine that, out here in Byzantium, Grandmother can sort of keep an eye on me. Parents are strange! *We* learn; *they* never do. But of course I won my point, and that's what counts!"

Mr. Seymour listened to this harangue with close attention, but offered no comment, not even a word in defence of parents. Neither did Mrs. Seymour, and the girls demurely kept their counsel.

So Gaines was living his own life, and he was perfectly willing that anybody and everybody should understand that he had no time for the childish games and avocations of his fellow-students, that he visited the college library with frequency and purpose, and that he was absolutely in earnest about his studies. He pleased himself by wearing to classes a waistcoat and over it a jaunty Norfolk jacket, with their concomitants of collar and tie, instead of trooping around in a sweater bundling him to the chin and a more or less worn

sack coat. Sometimes he even had the sublime impertinence to stick a carnation in his button-hole, and it did not seem to bother him a bit that irreverent classmates, in young resentment at the intrusion on the sacred myth of hobbledehoy Byzantium, had lost no time in dubbing him "Phoebe."

As a matter of fact, the students soon recovered from acute hostility to Gaines. His classmates were too busy with their innocent pleasures, such as they were, to indulge the long pursuit of persecution. Citified Phoebe was a natural target, but after all, some strange bird perches in every college class. Then, Phoebe was "bright"; and "brightness" without their definitely realizing it, exacted its portion of respect. So the class in general settled down to an indifferent tolerance of the class freak.

But certain big wigs of the college and the town were less forgiving of the Higher Pantheist. The shameless avowal of a religious eccentricity (how Helma wished that Gaines had heeded her father's offer of the family pew!), coming on top of the disclosure of erratic tastes in literature and art, was not to be dismissed lightly. If some of the perturbed gentlemen who were considering the matter failed to take quite so solemn a view of the Gaines "infidelity" as others, they were no less fixed in their belief that a frivolous attitude toward the great truths of revealed religion was an insidious poison, requiring radical treatment. And if there had been any lazy weakening in the zeal of these Byzantine worthies, their uncompromising dames were ready to provide at once and in quantity the missing backbone.

As the months went by, it thus became increasingly obvious that surely, if slowly, a tempest of indignation was gathering around Gaines. But whatever he might have guessed and thought, the *sang-froid* of the fantastic freshman seemed equal to any emergency, and with the Seymours, at least, he gave not the slightest intimation that he descried troubled waters ahead. He was always the same affable, debonair visitor from a world without, wearing his straw-

colored locks and his festive apparel with an engaging difference, and bringing a welcome exhilaration to a household that had come to regard the newcomer as almost of their own flesh and blood. There was some magic about the youth, a sort of detachment from the irksome consistencies of a plodding and stupid world, which discouraged in his presence any reference to the impending storm, but in his absence the prudent John Theodore at length gave his family an inkling of his own growing concern.

"The boy doesn't fit in here," he said, puffing at his pipe. "He ought to have gone at once to an eastern university, as his family wanted him to. There he wouldn't find the prejudices that he runs up against here. Nobody in Cambridge or New Haven bothers now about nineteen-year-old pantheism. Of course, eventually he will pack up and go off to Harvard or Yale. If hazing in its cruder form were a Byzantine custom, I'm sure he would have gone before the first week was over." And then he added, almost with vehemence and as if silencing a doubt in himself, "But it isn't a question of viciousness in the fellow; it's merely nonconforming."

Meantime, Gaines's indifference to all the pother was observed by the entire community, and it only served to aggravate the spreading indignation. Though at first people refrained from outspoken disparagement of the young fantast in the presence of any of the Seymours, who had received him, as it were, with open arms, in due course Agnes, the one that succumbed least to his hypnotic influence, came home with the gossip. The only definite germ which the Byzantine microscope could isolate in his conduct was the poison of his profane and purple æsthetics, a poison, it was already suspected, to which Helma Seymour, Bertha Crumbacker, and two or three other of his girl friends were no longer immune. The fact that they could often be seen together on the campus, and that once or twice they had even taken walks into the featureless country beyond the town, was "causing comment," as Agnes portentously put it.

A further damaging circumstance was the fact that all the girls were studying French, and it was a matter of suspicion amounting almost to a certainty that under the tutelage of this travelled and precocious youth their acquaintance with French literature was expanding beyond the "Abbé Constantin" and the "Dernière Classe" and certain (not all!) plays of Corneille, Racine, and Molière that the faculty had pronounced fit for undergraduate reading.

Helma listened to her sister's catalogue of accusations with an inward perturbation that she prayed might have no outward sign. She vowed that the very next day the yellow paper volume labelled "Fort comme la Mort," which she had tucked under her mattress for safe keeping, should go back to Bertha Crumbacker, who had passed it on to her. And she kept saying over and over to herself, "I don't like it much anyway." But she could not leave the sittingroom while Agnes held forth, and, besides, her father was a study. Evidently, he was not deeply impressed, but he *was* annoyed. Though Agnes had been soft-spoken and greyly literal in her *exposé,* Helma was still tremulously aware that this was the first time a daughter of the house had ventured to lift her voice in anything that hinted at a reflection on parental policy. By degrees Helma was forgetting the novel under the mattress in her absorption in her father and what he would say, for beyond a doubt he was preparing to say something.

When Agnes had finished with her last *on dit,* and had dropped her eyes to the embroidering that she now held before her stiffly with both hands, John Theodore removed his pipe from his lips, carefully expelled three beautifully-formed smoke rings, and then spoke.

"Well, Agnes," he said, "all that you tell us is very, very dreadful" (Helma felt a welcome relief in finding the reprimand she knew inevitable thus pleasantly sugar-coated), "but a young lady of the intelligence and good sense that I trust are yours can make better use of her time than in soaking up all this malicious gossip."

"I thought you'd want to know, father," murmured Agnes, abashed, if not convinced.

"I don't know now," returned John Theodore, thrusting his pipe back into his mouth with a humorous twist.

The discussion was closed and Helma seized the opportunity to slip away to her room and make sure that "Fort comme la Mort" was still in its hiding place. As soon as ever she could get out in the morning that dangerous exhibit should go back to Bertha Crumbacker, and then never again! But at the same time she felt herself deeply grateful to her father for his implied defense of the local source of all such forbidden fruits of the pen. Still, even so, she wasn't sure he would have spoken as he had to Agnes if he had known what was concealed in her bed. Poor Winfield! Perhaps he *didn't* quite deserve the faith, or whatever it was, her father evidently had in him. Nevertheless, she was genuinely glad her father had it. And Winfield, even if he *did* own strange books and pictures, was so much better in every way than the rude, psalm-singing creatures the mere thought of whom sometimes made her positively sick.

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Inevitably there were those self-appointed custodians of the public welfare common to every small town to say the wise word to Mr. Seymour about the terms of intimacy on which the questionable young man was received in his household. "We know, of course, that nothing could go wrong where you understand the facts, but there are some things which might not reach your ears." Mr. Seymour made no secret to his family of these well-intended warnings, but they seemed to leave him singularly unmoved. With Mrs. Seymour the busy-bodies enjoyed appreciably more success. They had the satisfaction of causing that excellent lady to look, for the moment at least, puzzled and grieved. Meantime, it was plain to the Seymour household that the unofficial watch and ward was threatening to become as numerous as the Byzantines themselves. The *posse comitatus* stage

actually seemed imminent, and though nothing so crude as tar and feathers had so far sullied the fair fame of collegiate Byzantium, one irate pillar of orthodoxy openly declared that the way to handle a professed unbeliever, with a lot of strange tastes and ways besides, was to ride him out of town on a rail!

The remark was repeated with more or less amusement, but the Seymours and everybody else realized that it was by no means all a joke. At least once in Byzantine history heroic remedies had been contemplated seriously. It was over the elopement of poor silly little Amy Gardner, the "wayward" daughter of a highly respected professor in the college. (Helma, a child at the time, remembered Amy only as a very pretty girl, blonde and rosy, with the mark she now knew must be human frailty written in her liquid eyes and baby mouth. But the word "wayward" had resounded always in sinister warning from those distant years.) If the drummer ("Just a cheap drummer!") that had carried Amy off with him and then left her to find the road back home alone had ever had the impudence to turn up in Byzantium again! . . . But of course he did nothing of the sort. It was the Gardners, father, mother, and daughter, who soon learned they had no choice but to go away. Such a grave breach of moral procedure could not be passed over unpunished. Somebody must suffer, if only the victim for being victimized! But, though Helma, even as a child, grasping little of what it was all about, had wondered as children will, it had never occurred to her to question the ultimate justice of a stern and baffling decree. . . That punishment was historic—could anything like it be in store for Gaines?

The subject of the present tumult continued in his usual ways, still seemingly oblivious of the dire destinies that might be brewing for himself, and so adding fuel daily to the smouldering wrath of the exasperated Byzantines. It was now that Mr. Seymour showed himself really anxious, though his commentary went little further than an occa-

sional "I wish I knew just what to do for Gaines!" Or "Why *won't* that pig-headed boy show himself at church on Sunday!"

Nevertheless, Helma was at a loss how to construe her father's attitude in the affair, the more so since she could not possibly question him on such a matter, and loyalty both to him and to Gaines forbade her discussing it with anyone else, even with her mother or Agnes. Every day the riddle faced her anew, and every day she gave it up! There could be no doubt that the whole subject of Gaines was becoming painful even to her. At moments she found herself wishing he had never appeared in Byzantium. But immediately all that his being there had really meant to her would rise in accusing protest against such rank ingratitude.

One evening Mr. Seymour came home wearing a look of distinct relief.

"Well, I've got some news for you to-night," he announced. "Dr. Twining has decided to take up Gaines's case himself in an informal way, and I rather think he'll find a safe path out of the muddle. For it's really nothing *but* a stupid muddle," he added, as if to coax himself and his hearers from their recent fears.

A faculty meeting, it seemed, had taken place that afternoon, to which Mr. Seymour, as counsel for the college, had been summoned. The principal subject under discussion proved to be none other than the disposition to be made of the more and more troublesome Winfield Gaines. And President Twining, in his gentle but insistent way, had cut short debate before it should reach the acrimonious stage by declaring that first of all he proposed to try out to the full the ancient device known as moral suasion, and that in any case there would never be the necessity for violent action on the part of anybody. This firm stand by the President at once put a new color on things. The spirit of militant virtue retreated for the moment, a little shamefaced. The President further indicated that he believed there was a soul to be saved, and his amiable way of going

about that task was recognized by his colleagues as providing a sovereign accelerator toward salvation. So Byzantium had to postpone its witch-burning "without day," overborne in its pursuit of a justice a little wild by the lofty clemency of executive interposition.

As Mr. Seymour was telling his story, with an unconcealed satisfaction and exempting the worthy Dr. Twining from his habitual mild irony, it was clear at last to Helma how much her father must really care. And she had inward pride of his fairness and compassion. For she now cared too. In spite of the adventure with the French books, in which she had had her guilty share, she truly admired Winfield; this boy was always the trafficker of dreams from other worlds, bringing to her hungry mind and senses welcome marvels. Besides, he really seemed almost a member of the family; if not quite like a brother, at least like that less familiar and quotidian kinsman, wearing the aura of a very perceptible difference and distance, a cousin from elsewhere of the earth. Yet with all the frank intimacy, perhaps because of it, so much as the possibility of a courtship did not seem to enter into anybody's reckoning, certainly not into that of Helma or of the unembarrassed "molly-coddle." It would have taken just that to spoil everything!

Helma did not see Gaines on the campus the following day, nor did he visit the Seymour house. But when Mr. Seymour returned home for dinner, nearly a half hour late, he brought more news. So much Helma could tell before he spoke, but beyond the fact that her father seemed not at all elated, she failed to divine its import. In the first absence of the maid, Mr. Seymour briefly informed his wife and daughters that the interview between Dr. Twining and Gaines had taken place that afternoon, and that later he had had an account of it from the presidential lips. "But for that," he said, "wait till we're in the sittingroom."

When the four were gathered there at a safe distance from the prying ears of servants, and Mr. Seymour's pipe

was drawing comfortably, he told his not altogether comfortable story.

The president's projected interview with the young man about the existence and state of his soul had borne little fruit. The president was all prepared for an argument: he was ready to expound, to reason, to convince, if need be, to coax. But the singular youth objected to nothing that he said. The president brought up, in as off-hand a way as he could, the subject of pantheism. Gaines asserted that he saw nothing in it contrary to the Episcopal faith in which he had been reared. Dr. Twining seized the proffered chance and asked him whether he subscribed to that faith article by article. Gaines replied that nobody now pays any attention to the articles of belief or even bothers to read them, but that he accepted the Apostles' Creed just as much as any Episcopalian needed to.

The president, being a Congregationalist, held himself incompetent to dig too deeply into doctrinal matters peculiar to another communion. He might feel somewhat less than fully satisfied with Gaines's answers, still, after that avowal, there was no clear excuse for his continuing the investigation. He admitted to Mr. Seymour that he found himself in the predicament of a ship standing all sails set upon a windless ocean. So, long before he had contemplated resorting to any such emergency measure, he was driven, from sheer lack of anything else to put forward, to suggesting that the young man bear witness to the faith that was in him by joining the Students' Endeavor League and taking an active part in its work (the president confessed that the expedient, even as he uttered it, had sounded for once singularly tame and inefficacious). Gaines's reply to this counsel was that as an Episcopalian he would prefer membership in the Brotherhood of St. Christopher.

"Dr. Twining was perfectly good-natured in telling me about it," Mr. Seymour summed up, "but I could see he was puzzled, and I haven't a doubt he is now doubly sure that there must be truth behind the Orthodox story of the

Episcopalian who gloried in his church because it has nothing to do with either politics or religion. . . So you see," and his features resumed their look of gravity, "nothing is really determined yet about poor Gaines." He paused a moment, then, with a gesture of wry impatience, added, "The whole thing does seem a bit exaggerated, even in this hot-bed of Calvinistic prejudice!" and he ran his fingers through his hair, as if somehow to smooth out the difficulties that way.

CHAPTER IV

However, the immediate crisis in the Gaines affair was passed. Presidential intervention, if it had accomplished nothing final, had at least blunted the cutting edge of public indignation and dropped a wet blanket of effective discouragement on the sturdy little flame of the *posse comitatus* idea. Thus even Byzantium might eventually have grown used to Gaines and his jaunty brand of "infidelity," accepting this fantastic student with other inextinguishable evils, minimized by habit, such as the town drunk or fool. Besides, it was baseball season. And so things might have drifted on through spring weeks of indecision and forgetfulness to the end of the college term if the chancing of an afternoon had not brought matters again to a head.

Helma was due at Spinti's that day at four to go over some duets with Bertha Crumbacker. Two other girls who took their lessons earlier had asked to stay on and hear the duets. Helma was walking briskly toward Spinti's under the fresh leafage, humming softly to herself. Trustful of her feet in the familiar ways, her mind was anywhere.

"*Salut, ma princesse d'or!* Where do you think *you're* going?"

She heard something slip from a fence rail, and the next moment her two elbows were seized from behind, stopping her short, almost before she had time to recognize the voice of Winfield Gaines.

"What on earth are you trying to do, scare me to death?" she cried, recovering her breath.

With a familiar skip he released her elbows and bowed in mock courtesy before her.

"Are you playing Jack-in-the-Box to-day, popping up on people like that?"

"Of course . . . Fool's tassels and everything!"

"But why were you hiding that way, Winfield?"

"I wasn't hiding anywhere. I was just perched up on Pop Abercrombie's rail fence swinging my legs and meditating on the universe. Yesterday it was autumn, to-day it is spring, to-morrow it's autumn again, then it's somebody else's spring."

"It seems to me you neglect summer and winter," objected Helma.

"They don't count in my little scheme of things," Gaines answered blithely, with an airy waving of his right hand skyward. "They're for forgetting.

"I supposed your scheme was for all time." Helma hesitated an instant, she had never yet touched on the religious peculiarity of her young friend; then she added with a little of inner timidity: "I thought it was Pantheism, or something like that . . . very big."

"Oh, so you've heard all about it, too! . . . Well, it's all the same anyhow," he added cryptically. "Whatever gods may be, let's worship them as we like; or, if we don't like, not at all." Suddenly he looked grave: "The only thing that counts is to be yourself. The rest doesn't matter. That's why I came to Byzantium. That's why some day you'll wake up and leave Byzantium. Why *do* people bother one another! . . . Look at all this rumpus. But I've come through it."

It was the only time he had hinted to her of the ordeal that had given them all so much concern.

"But why do you bring up the solemn stuff an afternoon like this? You're much too serious, Helma. To-day it's positively annoying."

"And how about you, Mr. Toplofty?" she answered him back. "You can be annoying too! Just now you said I was asleep."

He threw her a sidewise glance, faunlike, and pursed his lips to sing:

"'*Frau Holde kam aus dem Berg hervor!*'" he chanted in falsetto mockery of a soprano, dwelling on every accent with burlesque insistency.

"Oh, let's forget about it, Helma!" he broke back into speech. "Maybe you're asleep without knowing it yourself. But you won't be always." He flapped his hands winglike and did a little pirouette on the tip of his toes. "'*So rief der Lenz in dem Wald!*'" he chanted again in his own tenor. And then, quite soberly: "But you never answered my question. You didn't tell me where you are going, and here we are walking on, just as if we had a purpose, when we haven't; acting a lie, living a lie. Do you realize it, miss? Perfectly shocking!"

"I'm going, if you want to know, to meet Bertha at Professor Spinti's, and if I don't hurry, I shall be late!"

"Oh, yes . . . to the famous singing lesson," and Gaines gave himself the air of being deeply impressed.

"No," she corrected him. "It's not a lesson for me. A couple of other girls will be there, and Bertha and I are going over some duets with the professor, that's all. It's more to please Bertha, who sings second."

"I'll bet she sings second," put in Gaines. "Now look here, Helma, I wouldn't cross the street to hear *you* sing . . ."

"Thank you so much!"

"Well, I don't have to. I can sit comfortably in one of your own parlor chairs on the days when the prima donna deigns. But that Ohio Valley foghorn, *that* ought to be music for all the gods, Dr. Pentateuch's as well as mine! *I'm* going with you to your professor's! I haven't another earthly thing to do this afternoon. Do you mind?"

"Why, you horrid old cat! Let Bertha sing; she loves

to. If Spinti can stand it, you can. . . No, I don't mind. Come along."

Professor Spinti naturally looked surprised when he opened the door to an unexpected young man, but he received Gaines with an old world politeness that seemed the expression of a genuine cordiality. The duets were duly sung. Then there was a little impromptu general singing. They stopped for want of incentive to go on and looked at one another dimly questioning, somehow aware that the singing did not suffice. That profound human instinct which makes for a party even in the imprisoning orthodoxy of a Byzantium wakened at the lyric touch. It wanted only ten minutes to five. The hour and its associations in a long-stretching European past must suddenly have stricken the hidden consciousness of Spinti. He found the words, though halting.

"I'd lika to treat da younga people here, but I no eata here, neverr—*mai*—"

Gaines, of the world beyond, snatched up the cue.

"Why, come over to my house, all of you, I'll make tea. . . I'm just around the corner, then one block more, not three minutes from here. There's plenty of time. I make tea for myself nearly every afternoon. My landlady can't make tea for a hang. I tried her before my own tea things arrived. Besides, I've got a gorgeous chocolate cake that my Grandmother just sent me from Cleveland. The kind that's frosted outside and all gooy with custard inside. It isn't cut yet, but it will be!" Gaines fairly crowed now with the prospective joys of his tea party. "Professor Spinti will be our chaperon!"

It was a stampede. The party impulse trampled everything else under foot. In less than five minutes they were all in front of Gaines's house—white, two-storied, maple-shaded, set back in its neat yard, almost a counterpart of the house that sheltered Spinti.

Gaines took the stairs, two at a time, shouting an excuse for going up first.

If it occurred to anybody that there might be a prejudice against the girls visiting a student's room, even under the chaperonage of Professor Spinti, nobody breathed a syllable to that effect. Tea at five in Byzantium was unheard of. This was no college town affair; this was Bagdad of the Thousand Nights and One Night, though of the six pilgrims perhaps only Helma and Gaines could have called it by its name.

Gaines had two rooms, he told his guests as he threw open the door from the hall. This was his study. A curious curtain all of beads covered what was undoubtedly the door into his bedroom. Against the wall opposite the hall door, stood an upright piano, but of a light and variegated wood polished to shine like glass. Flanking its glistening bulk rose a piano-lamp, rich in wrought-iron scroll work and shirred bewilderment of silk and lace. On the music-rest a dull green score bore in big gilt letters the legend "Tristan und Isolde."

"We won't say anything about it to the old Dago; it's Wagner and he'd be horrified," Gaines whispered in Helma's ear, "but I'll bring that opera over to the house on Sunday."

Gaines was already flitting here and there, filling and lighting a neat copper kettle and setting out on the table a generous array of blue cups and saucers and flowered plates.

"My, what pretty dishes!" marvelled Bertha in an impressed *sotto voce*. "Where and in under the canopy did you get those plates, Phoeb'? I'll bet in Chicago!"

"No, I picked them up in the Tyrol," Gaines answered, not pausing in his preparations. For the moment Bertha was muted, as if rebuked. The other guests, over whose mirth a hush had fallen, were gazing about them on a sight unparalleled in Byzantium. To make room on the table Gaines had carried a big bowl of irises to his flat-top desk, placing it carefully on the spreading blotter, which he summarily cleared of papers and books. Helma looked at the dragon-covered bulge of the bowl, and from that to prints of ladies in quaint attitudes that were tacked in a random-

seeming abundance on the walls. But all, she soon saw, was not Japanese.

At one end of a becushioned couch hung a strange representation of starved and baleful cats.

"That's one of my Steinlen posters," explained Gaines, more interested now, looking up from a lemon he was slicing. "And that of the woman over there with the boa is another. She's the great French actress Réjane."

"Oh," exclaimed Bertha, this time on familiar ground, "she must be the French actress my folks saw in New York. It wasn't Sarah Bernhardt, I don't think, and it couldn't have been Olga Nethersole. . . Anyhow, my father says she's immense. I do hope she'll come to Cincinnati."

"That snaky woman above the mantelpiece," continued Gaines, ignoring the interruption from the Crumbacker family, "is my only Aubrey Beardsley. Isn't she wicked and lovely?"

He now disappeared beyond the beaded curtain, but returned directly with a little stack of colored luncheon napkins and a thin glass pitcher full of cream. These he put down on the table and then went out again. Helma detected furtive glances as if in search of some trace of the lost "Oil Lamper." None was visible in the whole art collection, but up on the piano between a stack of music and a pot of flowering jonquils, stood the yellowing lady who had lost her arms and was losing her robe.

"Why, it's only the Venus de Milo!"

There was unmistakable disappointment in Bertha's whispered announcement of her discovery. Helma could not refrain from a slightly scornful, "Didn't you know that all the time?"

Gaines was back again in the room carrying the cake suitably disposed on a large china plate, shaped expressly with two little handles, and amid a chorus of delighted approval, to which even Professor Spinti lent the dignity of his time-honored basso, the prodigal youth cut generous slices through the thick and tempting chocolate of its surface.

"*Assomiglia molto al Castello di Sant'Angelo!*" In the rare pleasure of this sight the Italian had fallen back on his native Tuscan, which Helma, and perhaps Gaines and Bertha, understood.

"At last we're ready!" declared Gaines, letting the knife he had been using rest between two slices of the dissected sweetmeat, and producing from its hiding place, in one of his blue cups, a silver tea-ball, whose perforated surface was adorned with the visage of a grinning African. "It's always the chaperon before the girls. Professor, cream or lemon in your tea, and one lump of sugar or two?"

They were all soon intent on the feast, drinking their tea with zest and voluptuously munching the big slices of cake, which was unanimously voted the very best chocolate cake ever. Through the open window the breath of the Maytime drifted in from the flowering vines and hedges, and the voices of the old professor and his young friends eddied back to the little garden in a chattering rivulet of merriment. Spinti beamed on the girls and the one boy like an indulgent and elderly angel. The only noticeable drawback to the affair was a diminishing appetite for dinner brought about by the irresistible abundance of Gaines's tea and cake.

Suddenly Bertha answered the call of the wild. Jumping up she flounced over to the piano and began thumping out "Whistling Rufus" from its satiny belly.

"Here, I know what!" she shouted, stopping as abruptly as she had begun. "The only way to celebrate that chawclate cake is with a real, honest-to-goodness cake-walk!" And in a jiffy she was up, shoving the table into a corner, shooing the others out of the way, pushing the chairs back against walls and windows. . . "Now, Phoeb'," she commanded, seizing Gaines's arm, "you take Helma and walk for that cake as if your life depended awn it. Never mind because we've eaten up the cake. That don't make one bit o' difference. Walk for that blessed grandmother of yours

in Cleveland! Now Helma, do your prettiest, child alive; and look out for the lamp when you swing!"

Bertha whisked back to the piano, and her hands stormed into "Way Down in Georgia." Gaines had Helma's arm, and both of them, bending far, far back (it almost cut the breath in her throat) pranced up and down the brief floor space and then around its sides in a quadrangular quickstep till the house quivered with the pulse of their locomotion, while the beating hands of Spinti and the girls on the side lines chimed in with the savage frenzy of the piano.

Bertha was pounding on the bass like a demon sledge-hammer, when, without warning, the hall door opened wide. Helma had a glimpse of a frantic female, all eyes and uplifted palms, who she knew must be the landlady. She and Gaines stopped as if thunder-struck. Gaines laid an arresting hand on Bertha's shoulder. Bertha stopped too and swung around on the piano stool to face them. Dead silence. "Oh, it's only you!" came with a withering deliberation from the figure in the doorway. "*I* thought the world was comin' to an end. *I* was afraid for the ceilin' underneath." Without another syllable she shut the door, and her footsteps could be heard descending the stairway with an emphasis positively funereal, as if that stairway conducted to the tomb.

"I guess we *have* been making too much noise," said Helma, recovering her presence of mind.

"Oh, she's a fussy old hen," Gaines remarked lightly, as if to turn the interruption off as unimportant, but something in his face showed that really he didn't regard it as quite a laughing matter.

"Well, anyhow, Winfield," Bertha's emphatic voice sounded a note of wholesome reassurance, "we've had a perfectly bully party, and, great jumping Jerusalem grasshoppers, it's *time* she came and told us to scat; it's nearly half past six! Who ever heard of such goings on right here in holy Byzantium, and in daytime, too!"

In spite of Gaines's landlady and her temper fit, it did

not occur to Helma that there could be any real harm in their little jollification, not even to the parlor ceiling, nor did the other guests signify the slightest misgiving as together they stepped down the front path to the street. Tea and chocolate-cake between five and half past six, posters and Japanese prints and a merry cake-walk, all in the room of a freshman who gathered irises into a bedragoned bowl —what had this to do with Byzantium and the Byzantines, with predestination, atonement, and original sin? . . . Spinti's face still glowed beatifically when beyond the gate he bade the girls good-bye, and as the four stood there for a moment before going their several ways home, Bertha spoke her frank reaction:

"I know the boys don't know what to make of Phoebe, but *I* like him: I think he's awfully cute. It was the nicest party I ever dreamed of having in this poky old burg!"

That, however, was not the view which obtained with several Byzantine mothers the moment the story of the interrupted frolic got about, as without delay it did. Helma learned to her amazement that these apprehensive matrons lost no time in warning Spinti that if the undesirable youth was a frequenter of his studio, they would withdraw their daughters from his instruction forthwith. Even her own father, she found, regarded the visit of the girls, though they were four, to a student's room, without more responsible chaperonage than an Italian singing-teacher, as something of an escapade, or at least an indiscretion. So the whole Gaines affair, which she felt more and more was at once paltry, ugly, and unnecessary, would have to be raked out into the open and threshed over anew!

Spinti himself told her, at her next lesson, of the answer he had made the embattled mothers.

"You know I a practical man. How you say dat in your Engleesh? I no born yeste'day. *Non per niente* ol' Spinti liva his seventy year all over da worl'. Of course I no see not'in' outa da way in da younga man. He acta like gentlaman. Evert'in' all right wit' da younga ladies.

Da ol' Spinti no permit ant'in' ot'er in his studio. But if da mot'er feel datta way 'bouta da daughter, I tella dem I neverr suspe't not'in' wrrong, but I verry gladda to have deir informations. Da younga man neverr com' here again, an' I neverr go backa by him, neverr . . . Datta younga fella no' mean not'in' to me." He went on in a crescendo of excitement. "He no sing; he no Rubini, Mario, Gayarre! All datta matter to Spinti is livin', *a mantenere la vita*, an' Helma—Helma, her voice! *Ah, si, la voce di Helma!*"

And Helma realized that nothing did matter. Somewhere in her there must have been deep satisfaction in the knowledge, but more superficially she felt rancor against that human injustice which was enveloping Winfield in its undiscourageable stupidity, and showing Spinti, whom she knew also as a man of real kindliness, in the light of an impersonal voice fancier and purveyor of musical instruction.

Maternal ire proved a formidable invader of the field whence presidential intervention had retired after no better showing than a drawn battle. Under insistent petticoat pressure, the faculty was forced to take up the affair again and in secret conclave to discuss (so much Mr. Seymour could tell his wife and daughters) the best disposition to be made of this persistently disturbing youth. Renewed investigation showed that despite the popular uproar, no definite excuse for expulsion could be brought against him. He was studious and to all appearances orderly; he had not, unless in the doubtful case of the imprudent tea party in his rooms, transgressed the letter of any of the collegiate rules and regulations; he minded his own business.

"There's the real rub!" was Mr. Seymour's comment to his family. "Minding your own business is no more in favor here than it ever was! I've never quite lived down that local prejudice myself, and I have a hundred things in my favor that Gaines has not."

Notwithstanding a record so free of specific blame, the faculty, it seemed, felt to a man that the lad must some-

how be got out. The very fact that the poison was scarcely more ponderable than a few French books, some baffling prints and posters, and a tendency to mix Episcopacy and pantheism in a strange, heretical confusion, made it, in their opinion, only the more insinuatingly dangerous. Since there was evidently not the slightest prospect of saving a soul to Orthodoxy through any of the devices invoked toward that end in Byzantium, the local dons concluded that the best place for the incorrigible young æsthete would be not their pious college, with its untarnished tradition of belief, but one of those worldly universities of the East, even though plain-spoken folk might call them godless. There, conceivably, through his devotion to the service of art, he might eventually be led to the great light of true religion. (At any rate such miracles had been spoken of by God-fearing men, and perhaps recorded in black and white.) The moral obligation being deftly shifted from the newer West to the older East, a subtle contamination would be removed forever from Byzantium.

"I don't know just how the thing will be brought about," Mr. Seymour remarked to his family one Sunday after Gaines had left them. "When he spoke just now of changing his rooms next year, I almost told him to chuck it all and go to Harvard. But I remembered in time that as an officer of the collegiate body it is not my place to discourage attendance."

He removed his pipe from his lips and examined it with a little frown before he put it back. "We shall miss the rascal a good deal, shan't we?" he added, almost as if speaking to himself.

And Helma gathered from his words and tone that her father harbored no doubt as to Winfield's parting company with Byzantium College at the end of the term, and her heart quailed a little as she remembered how near at hand that day was.

When the time came, the prophecy implied in Mr. Seymour's words proved true, and the manner of it was natural

enough. In the final examinations Gaines "flunked" both his required mathematics and his required "science." On the strength of that pair of E's, though in literature and the languages even reluctant professors were obliged to admit that he had broken all Byzantine records, the dean of the college "advised" him with a definiteness that left no room for two interpretations thenceforth to seek the fruits of learning elsewhere.

It was the evening of his last dinner under the roof which, in the language of the time and place, had been a "second home" to him that Mr. Seymour, freed now of his collegiate duty of silence, spoke the words of fatherly counsel. When the leave-takings were over, though there was much brave talk of the meetings the future held in store for them all, Helma had a haunting sense that an irrecoverable brightness had vanished from psalm-singing Byzantium forever. . . But from her own life. . . That was different. . . She glanced up at her father. What was *he* thinking? . . . All that he said, when the boy had swung the front gate shut and disappeared beneath the crowding shadows of the maples, was: "Well, we must admit that it's the best thing for Gaines . . . the only thing."

Helma pondered often these words of her father's, for in the days that followed Gaines was continually in her thoughts. Although even for her he had not been without his irritating moments, she had liked the boy instinctively, and chumming with him had had no awkwardness of personal misgiving. He was as neutral to her as a girl. Sometimes consciously now she knew that she was of no stuff that mates with the hobbledehoy, for more than once the presence of one had stirred within her a sickening dread. Her friendship with Gaines, encompassed by the necromancy of travel and art, had had the untroubled candor of childhood.

CHAPTER V

Professor Spinti had now remained Helma's one real intimate outside of the Seymour household. The "shy and offish" girl felt no more shy and offish with the old fellow than with the innocuous "molly-coddle" whom the college faculty had deemed it wise to remove. Had it not been for the age of Professor Spinti and the very palpable absence of even the remains of anything suggesting physical prestige, scandal would doubtless have wagged an active tongue. But, Spinti being Spinti, even Byzantium stopped short of so obvious an extravagance.

Thus it was that Helma became the professor's "star" pupil. The praise which Spinti gave her voice she dared repeat only in part, even to her parents. Her mother seemed not to take it in at all, and her father, in his gently ironic tone, merely remarked that if it were all true, he was father to a miracle, not a daughter. But Spinti naturally told the good news to others, and, small-town fashion, the shy and fair-haired Helma was for a time almost a butt for pointing fingers. Until she sang. Bertha had heard her, whole-souled, talkative Bertha, and at Spinti's she sometimes sang for other pupils and his guests. On one occasion she was persuaded to take part (Spinti persuaded her; she wouldn't have done it for anybody but for him) in a charity concert, and presently she was singing (again by advice of Spinti) in the church choir that her father sang in no more. The bitterest gossips of Byzantium now could not but admit Professor was right. Helma Seymour did have a voice!

And Helma was the making of Spinti. All the girls with a particle of vocal excuse, and many of the matrons, absolutely *had* to study with the teacher of Helma Seymour. The lucky Spinti thus found himself in an amazingly short time a Byzantine institution. Even if he was not of the college faculty, one might almost say that the Spinti academy had become a second and scarcely less respected college. He

now engaged as his official "assistant" a woman whom Mrs. Voigt had recommended as a reliable sight-reader to play the piano accompaniments at his lessons, while he, relieved of that burden, stood or sat in full professorial dignity. He undertook to give a musicale in his rooms once a month, and somehow succeeded in making it felt what a privilege it was to be invited, for there Miss Helma Seymour might be expected to sing. Thus, over night almost, Spinti was *the* professor and a social factor of consequence.

But, with it all, Helma was his one real pupil, and to Helma the hours at Spinti's were her life. He drilled her tirelessly in exercises; if he gave her a few parlor songs—"Jus' li'l' pieces to singa *a casa*," he said with a Latin sententiousness—they were only trifling diversions from the incessant vocal practice on the vowels of his own language. And one day he sent for the soprano album for her, and when it arrived, under Spinti's enthusiastic guidance, Helma entered the enchanted kingdom of Italian opera.

And Spinti had been there in person, he had lived there. Spinti *knew*. Doubtless his opera days had passed in small theatres undiscovered to fame. He never boasted of having sung with Patti, Campanini, Gayarre, or Tamagno, but he had heard them, and many others. Their names, and names far older, were to him a superstition and a cult. So they became to his pupil and disciple. And as Helma memorized and pondered with her master the storied phrases of "*Bel raggio*" and "*Ah, non credea*" and "*Casta Diva*," what was to prevent her from looking into the candle-lighted past and in fancy seeing herself for the nonce white-robed and crowned with bay, as she saw Pasta, Malibran, Grisi, Jenny Lind, Pauline Viardot, in the illustrated pages of an ancient and once highly esteemed publication, a certain "Lyra Operatica," which Spinti guarded jealously as one of the few precious possessions that he had acquired and saved on his wandering voyage through life?

There were other likenesses in the "Lyra Operatica." They were of men who played lover, hero, villain, father

stern or pitying, priestly comforter to the bay-crowned divas; Rubini, feathered hat in hand, stood ready as Jason to address to Medea-Pasta his "*A te, o cara!*" Tamburini, in the elegant habiliments of Don Juan, was adding another and another conquest to the well-grown catalogue of a thousand and three. Mario, with his proud Sardinian features, his curled moustachios, his cape so nonchalantly flung across one shoulder, posed as the real great lover, defending and sheltering distressed damsels, to the deeper troubling of their maiden hearts. Was he the knightlier apparition, Helma wondered, or was that other tenor of a sovereign grace, Adolphe Nourrit, who figured in the pages twice—first as the rakehelly hero of "Robert le Diable," and then as the noble and gentle Huguenot, Raoul?

"*I* could fall head over heels in love with him either way! And then there *is* something about a tenor voice . . ."

The perpetrator of this indiscreet remark was of course Bertha Crumbacker. But, then, Bertha was from Cincinnati, where the Germans had cherished a tradition of music as well as of beer, and where the most respected families went eagerly to hear opera as often as the opportunity presented itself. Bertha seemed to have absolutely no prejudice of any kind about the stage and stage people, unless the keenness of her interest in all of their manifestations in Cincinnati and elsewhere should be interpreted as a prejudice *pro*. Helma and she might have been closer companions if her attractive frankness had not here and there crossed a dividing line into something blunt and aggressive which secretly offended the shyer girl. Mrs. Seymour, who was not given to easy comment, in the height of the "molly-coddle" crisis once alluded to Bertha as "perhaps a little common." Helma felt her mother was right.

But the unashamed relish that imbued Bertha's outspoken admiration for the subjects of the old engravings in the "Lyra Operatica" were no deterrent to Helma from looking carefully on her own account. Spinti told her with amusement that this man had begun as a blacksmith, and the

other as a pastry cook, though Mario, Conte di Candia, was a genuine Sardinian noble, whom his family, immured in the unyielding tradition of their caste, forbade using the family name as a stage name.

"In *Italia* da greates' tenor of da *en*tira worl' was still on da level of mountebank. *Italia* a *li'l'* better now, but *la Spagna* no chang'a one bit. *Così vedete*, Helma, what *bestia* is really da 'uman an*imal!*";—and Spinti chuckled his old-man's chuckle.

In the impartial pages of the "Lyra" they all came through pretty much alike—noble, artisan, and cook. The precise, old-fashioned grace and airy formality of the engraver's strokes, the relentless idealization of face and figure and costume, left no tell-tale trace of origin, high or humble. These were detached lyric beings, creatures of the fire and air. They were the sentient elements of love, of joy, of sorrow. They issued from another universe than any that had sired the noisy, graceless hobbledehoys of Byzantium's football field and revival meeting. When Helma gazed, in a fascination for which she made no attempt to excuse herself, at the Don Juan, the Robert, the Raoul of those distant and enchanted days, she remembered the words "Prince Charming." With a little less of the air and a little more of the earth, but with the spell of the unaccustomed no whit altered, might not he, *the* Prince Charming, be even as one of these?

Here Helma drew the check-rein on her fancies sharply. There was work to do, there were songs to sing, and after all the "Lyra Operatica" was only an old torn book on an old man's bookshelf, filled with pompous engravings depicting singers dead and gone in a regularity as insipid as it was unreal—a lot of stage people of the long ago looking as nobody ever could have looked anywhere . . . But the next moment Helma was scolding herself for her base disloyalty. After all, these outmoded pages were the real romance, and, without giving it a name, she knew in them the nature of romance and its unconquerable hold on those who are marked

from the womb as its victims. It was the voice of the unknown, calling softly, insistently; of everything that was strange to Byzantium and the Byzantines.

And the things Spinti said to her were certainly not calculated to hush that voice. They left no doubt that in his own mind the old man already had placed her with that royal line of divas who looked out from under their crowns of bay in a calm detached and regal at the curious reader of the "Lyra Operatica." If other doubts persisted, she had only to sing alone and by herself, and before the exhilaration of that test they vanished. Sometimes when there was no chance of her being interrupted at a pastime which could so easily be held childish, she went further. A big white shawl was a mighty aid to fancy; so were the long folds of a simple gown, and mirrors never gossip. In hours when she was certain that only the speechless glass could share the knowledge, she crossed the north parlor from the square piano to the towering mirror and sang there her song. It was gratifying to prove, and to prove again, to her own mistrustful eyes, that Helma Seymour really could look enough the olden druidess, as her young soprano intoned the high sacerdotal accents of Norma's "*Sediziosi voci, voci di guerra.*" Or, she would place the ottoman opposite the glass and practise rising from it and stepping forward with a mien not too unworthy of the tawny-tressed Semiramis. Thus must Assyria's queen, against the sensuous chanting of the slave-girls, rise from her royal divan and advance to the footlights, "*Bel raggio!*" bursting from her lips in chains of jewelled notes.

CHAPTER VI

Opera? It had seemed as distant as the spheres, and a good half of Byzantium believed it wickeder than any theological hell. But opera was the word Spinti used, and somewhere in the profundities of Helma's being the word made its bed.

Now that the occasion had arisen, the great decision came automatically. The "home" was definitely broken up, since Agnes and her husband were going West. Such of the furniture as Agnes wanted she should take with her. What remained was to be sold or given away. And Helma's little patrimony from her share of the life insurance and the pitifully small sum that the house—*their* house—brought, should be used in continuing her musical education in New York. Spinti was insistent on that point; he had given her all that he could; some one with still more to give must worthily complete the noble work.

"At leas' nobody ever say, Helma," he declared solemnly, "da li'l' Professor Spinti spoila da voice. *Ciò non sia mai!*"

And the old Italian bowed his head and piously crossed himself, lest the very suggestion of such a horrifying idea start the powers of evil on their devastating course.

In New York there was a man, *un maestro esimio*, who, Spinti was sure, would be enchanted to prepare Helma for opera. The *maestro* in question was a former singer, a Frenchman, but his training had been Italian. The name was Dupont, Dubois, or something like that, he couldn't just remember. But his friend Gonsalvo in New York knew the *maestro* well!—Gonsalvo the big manager—and sent him pupils when he believed them talented enough. Whatever the man's name might be, it appeared he had great knowledge. But he had never had much voice, so said Gonsalvo, and at an age when many singers are still in full career he had given up the stage to teach. What he didn't know about singing wasn't worth knowing.

When Spinti had written to Gonsalvo inquiring about the right person for his *cara* Helma to study with in New York —for he had taken that liberty already—Gonsalvo had replied immediately that there was no professor, positively none, to be considered for a moment, except this Frenchman, "and what he desires above all things is a real talent" . . . But this and much more his friend Gonsalvo would be able to tell her in New York. As for Spinti himself, he was old;

he would never leave Byzantium again. Before he heard another voice like Helma's, he should be hearing the song of the cherubim.

It was all a little vague, and, away from the sorcery of Spinti's presence, Helma thought of it, more than once, with the proverbial grain of salt. So did Byzantium, in spite of the local fame her voice had gained, and Byzantium did not hesitate to say so. Still, as Helma told her sister and the optimistic parson, a year or two in New York ought in any case to be a good investment. From this teacher or some other she should at least learn enough to return to Byzantium and sing permanently in church there, and, in collaboration with Spinti perhaps, teach others what she had learned herself. This was a plausible manner of speaking, and it served to veil the doubts which were lurking not only in Helma, but also in her sister and in her sister's husband. The parson, of course, as well as Agnes, had something to say to her about the pitfalls spread for young women in New York, and how to avoid them. Then the benevolent wife of one of the professors recommended a New York boardinghouse, conducted by a most estimable and Christian gentlewoman of the unexpectionable name of Wilkins. This highly desirable hostess was, it seemed, a native of Byzantium, who had married and gone to New York even before the Seymours came to Ohio, and now had been for many years a widow, compelled to take boarders for a livelihood. There Helma would be at home as if with her own people, and so protected from all harm. Whereupon Agnes and her reverend spouse ceased from troubling, at least outwardly. And so things arranged themselves. But deep down in Helma's being the word "opera" was dreaming to a dawn.

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Opera! The letters seemed to be branded on her retina as she stood there in the long emptiness of the north parlor. Now that Agnes's footstep had left the last stair, there was

not a sound in the whole house. It was the inexorable stillness of desertion. O-P-E-R-A—she was alone with those five letters, reared against her like Alpine summits. She *must* find the trail, the relenting valley, which should open on her future and its predicted glory. A fear she could not name welled within her and possessed her. Furtively, like a jungle beast taking stock of foes, she looked around her at the bare room. It was stripped of everything, carpets, chairs, all, except the one towering glass on the south wall and near it the two packing-cases, with the hammer that had fastened them shut, and a few nails. The silent, indifferent splendor of the low-hanging sun flooded the room through windows completely unveiled to its rays. There was a brutal tranquillity in the insistent, proprietary entrance of this light, crimsoning the old north parlor with the indiscriminate impersonality of a massacre. It lodged there, the uncaring envoy of a fate no man born of woman may escape.

Helma's impulse was to shriek for Agnes, anybody . . . No, not Agnes! . . . Swaying toward the mirror, the one confidant of her unuttered hopes, she was now in the direct path of its reflection, and as the crimson torrent smote on the whiteness of her muslin dress and picked a thousand points of flame in the gold mass of her hair, a furious revulsion seized her. In the mirror she beheld now not herself, Helma Seymour, but an avenging heroine of myth or story —Jael, spattered with the blood of Sisera; Judith, bathed in the slaughter of Holofernes. And her face, half scarlet, half shadow, seemed knotted with the quenchless thirst of an irremediable deed.

And in that glass, which had known the young girl's solitary poses as Norma, Semiramis, Isolde, suddenly she saw something ancient and evil, beyond change and prayer, something that was and is and continues being. It stabbed through her brain that this flaming figure which stared back from the abyss of glass was life, was destiny, was the carolling and tolling of the bell. The future, which a moment earlier had borne her forward on its crest, yawned into a

fiery chasm like the opened gullet of a serpent stalking prey.

Dizzy and trembling before the apocalyptic accident, she reached stealthily for the hammer, and held it in her right hand. She stepped back a pace, her heart now beating high in a vindictive protest, lifted her arm, and poised the weapon. It was only a hammer and she was only Helma Seymour, but in the overpowering hatred of what she saw she might have been Hecuba or Niobe. She clenched her teeth and drew in her breath. She gripped the hammer for the blow that should smash that image into irrecoverable splinters. Frantically she glanced across her shoulder at the disk of the indifferent sun settling to the detached line of Byzantine roofs. There was a creaking of the door, a swift rustle of feet. She heeded nothing. Her arm was raised to strike. . . Then, from nowhere, a hand wrenched it backwards and down.

"Helma! . . . What are you *doing*, child! . . . Are you out of your mind!" Agnes, eyes blazing and mouth convulsively astretch, stood panting before her and clutching her wrist as if it were a snake to strangle. "You weren't going to break the mirror, were you? It goes with the house. Why, it belongs to Langdon Tibbs!"

"You're hurting me; let go my wrist!" gasped Helma. The hammer tumbled to the floor noisily. As she gazed at the tense literalness of her sister's visage, her mind undazzled. "I *must* have been crazy," she murmured foolishly. She could feel the hot blood surging to her cheeks now. . . "You couldn't take the mirror west with you. . . How could you?" . . . She heard her own feeble titter of apology. . . "I'm really *so* glad Langdon Tibbs is going to have it."

BOOK II — DUBOSC

CHAPTER I

THE station at Byzantium—grimy, malodorous relic of pioneer days in middle-western railroading—was the *rendez-vous* for many more persons than Helma would have chosen to see there the morning of her starting for New York. Indeed, her sister and her sister's husband, the latter *ex officio* and unavoidably, would have been quite enough aside from Spinti, whose presence of course was indispensable. But Helma discovered to her surprise that she was far from being the sole arbiter in this business that was so personal to herself. Byzantium also had something to say in the matter, and with a numerous voice.

At the wickedly early hour chosen by the railroad authorities for the brief stop of the only one of their New York expresses which they routed through Byzantium, the September air bit smartly. Notwithstanding that seasonal drawback, one might have inferred from the gathering throng that some high functionary of state, or a prince in the world of industry or finance, was about to address a word of greeting or adieu to the assembled citizens. And yet the attraction was only the youthful daughter of a deceased lawyer who had never enjoyed more than local repute, herself an unpaid singer in a struggling little church.

Helma divined at once the romantic impulse which had really driven so many Byzantines from the comfort of their beds at that unearthly hour to the cold and squalor of the town "depot." The charm that drew them was no tender

or solicitous thought for the young girl who had grown up in their midst and now was leaving them for many months, perhaps for years, but an image far more glamorous and compelling—the great metropolis of the East, toward which the girl was journeying; the Europe that lay beckoning beyond the barrier of ocean, and, still more, the forbidden, legendary land of opera. For the fateful word had stuck in the memory of Byzantium, with all it carried of magic, of glory, of whispered evil. That, not Helma Seymour, she knew, accounted for the crowd at the station.

Around her it surged and squeezed, and her hand was almost wrung off by the many who grasped it and gazed into her face as if in some mysterious way the fair-haired soloist of Grace Church had in one short night become sister to the resplendent and bewildering woman whom the Lord revealed to John on Patmos. Through the press of handshakers, Agnes, who was visibly crying, found a chance to say a word that sounded of real affection, though it might have been only that curious sentiment which will rise from the mystic bond of a childhood spent together. The parson whispered a parting injunction to be a good girl and to write "home" often. He even rubbed the counsel in with an admonitory shake of a very clerical forefinger, and then he kissed her pontifically on the forehead. (She noticed how more than ever he looked like a plucked, underfed chicken.) The practical one was Spinti. For him the crowd did not exist. There was only Helma. Impassive, steely, he stood beside her, a graven image of guardianship, and it was his cherishing hand that helped her up the steps of the Pullman, the devotion of his muscles that swung her valise to the waiting porter.

"Be gooda pupil to nex' professor like you binna to me an' you adorn da *scena lirica* sure!" the little Italian called up to her as she stood on the platform of the car. He was unheeding now of who might hear him, and the crowd was his audience.

"Gonsalvo he see you in two, t'ree days. I writa him. He com'!"

The engine sounded its shrill blast. Along the platform ran a trainman gesticulating. The crowd yielded and broke. Helma saw Agnes dab her eyes with a handkerchief and then begin to wave it.

" . . . adorn . . . da *scena lirica* . . . sure!" Spinti was shouting, both arms raised like semaphores. It might have been the moment the old fellow had waited for his life long. The crowd gasped at his words and actually sent up a feeble cheer, in honor of his handiwork; it had beheld with its own eyes that fabulous being, a *prima donna!*

Helma shook off the spell of the rapidity and strangeness of the happenings and felt for a handkerchief to wave back to Agnes and the rest. But already the train was going very fast. The station platform lay far behind and the outskirts of Byzantium were racing by on either side. Only then did the tears spring to her eyes. She hurriedly dried them and stepped into the car. Why she should cry she couldn't tell, for she couldn't find that she was sorry about anything. The old life was gone, irrevocably—father, mother, the house. This was the new life, the life she had come to desire above all else; *her* life. And yet, though she knew it was silly and false, for a moment she would have given anything to have Agnes beside her in that Pullman seat. Agnes . . . Howard Probbing . . . No, not that! . . . The old life *was* gone; *this* was the new.

The tide of tears had ebbed far away. She looked out at the uneventful Ohio farmland slipping past. It was time to take note of her surroundings and to arrange herself for the ride to New York, the longest journey of her life. She did not regret for a moment the venturesome luxury of a whole Pullman section which, on the advice, but not at the expense, of her solicitous brother-in-law, she had hesitatingly bought.

She hung up the coat that she had worn to the train, took off her travelling hat and pinned it on the back of the seat

before her, and pushed her valise squarely into the corner of the same seat. The motion of the express, solid and relentless in its impetus and speed, inspired a sort of confidence within her, was at once cheering and soothing. She forgot to fear a further assault of homesickness as she gave herself in a voluptuous surrender to the mighty cradling of this journey. The doors of the shrine that held her past, the past she still loved unquestioningly, were softly closed as on a treasure which she knew nothing could take from her and so did not need her constant watching. Beyond the car windows she could see the fertile land spreading its rich monotone under the mid-morning sunshine. How impersonal it looked in a strength and detachment that had nothing to do with her very personal problems. After all, *was* the business of this decisive morning such a stupendous matter? Of a sudden it had shrivelled to astonishingly inconsiderable proportions in the presence of the unrestricted power of earth about her, flowing freely in an unrelated strength and gladness beyond the farthest reach of her poor human vision. And yet to her . . . to her . . .

Opera! . . . She started to tell herself she knew . . . but what *did* she know, for all her years of study with old Spinti, her tireless digging in his "Lyra Operatica" and thence among encyclopædias and such histories of music as the college library afforded? She had sung and played over parts of many operas; when she was sure of not being caught, she had even posed as a singer of opera before a looking glass! But here, on her way to the *esimio maestro* in New York, she had to confess to herself that she had never yet seen an opera performed.

Her visits to the theatre, even, had been few and special. When they were all in Chicago for the World's Fair, they had gone to see a big spectacular piece at the Auditorium, which it was quite right that children should see because it set before their eyes the history of our country from Christopher Columbus on. That was her first experience of the theatre, and its sorcery had lingered. After she was in col-

lege, her parents had twice taken their daughters to Cleveland for a Shakespeare matinée with Julia Marlowe as Rosalind or Juliet. And once at Columbus, where her father had been called to argue a case, he rewarded his family for their devotion in accompanying him by treating them to an evening performance of Mme. Modjeska in "Mary Stuart."

Thus, for Helma, the theatre, so rarely revealed to her, had remained a world of mystery and faery, girt round with ceremonial flame, even though she now dared dream of personal conquest within its enchanted confines. In New York she would certainly see many good plays. That would be her duty. She told herself she knew. . . The impish question pounced back: After all, what really *did* she *know?*

Well, she assured herself, she knew that the task before her meant work, work, work, and still more work, quite apart from the undetermined element that Spinti reverently called the "gift." She was not afraid of work; she had worked tirelessly, devotedly, for Spinti, and he had fired her enthusiasm, turned it from day-dreaming, and directed it toward a definite goal.

But the "gift"? . . . New York would test *that* out. In any case, it meant a career of some sort. Career . . . The magic of the vaulting word raced in her blood as the train sped across the level land; it sang a song that rose above the thunder of the heavy cars and attuned its periods to a subtler and a nobler rhythm than the measured jouncing of the rail-ends. Career . . . Career. . .

She endeavored to be reasonable about it all, to view the undertaking in "that steady light of common sense" which her voluntary counsellors of recent weeks had never failed to stress. And, indeed, she had often told herself that her going to New York might mean no more than a period of very beneficial study and then a return to Byzantium to teach others what she herself so keenly felt, and . . . to sing again in Grace Church choir. . .

Grace Church choir! . . . It was as if a thousand merry

mocking devils hurled back at her their gay demoniac laughter! . . .

She stooped forward to the little glass set in between the windows of her section to whisk away a cinder. Verily it seemed that a princess young and comely looked back at her. . . And this was not the towering, grey-framed mirror that once she had nearly shattered. . .

Byzantium . . . Grace Church choir . . . How remote they were already!

Deep within her the career sang on. The voices doubled, multiplied, soared in a symphonic jubilation. . . She glanced around her in the car, almost fearful lest somebody might overhear. . . No danger! . . . An elderly gentleman was peering through his spectacles at a newspaper; a couple eagerly youthful—could they be a bridegroom and his bride?—seemed wholly absorbed in a game of cards that provoked them both to sharp, droll little exclamations; a stout and placid woman had laid aside a book to divert herself with crocheting. No one of them had any inkling of the miracle working in their midst.

But the swelling music streamed on. And the word that emerged from its multitudinous sonorities was not the great historic quadrisyllable "Byzantium." It was a softer, less imperial word—just "opera." To Helma it was *the* word. And at rest now in its encompassing harmonies, turned tender and soothing as a cradle song, she yielded all her care to the mesmeric motion of the train, bearing her resistlessly onward. . .

CHAPTER II

If the highly recommended Mrs. Wilkins had seen better days, so had the brown-stone house in the West Twenties of which she reserved to her bulky self only so much as she could not let out to lodgers. This fact was strongly present to Helma as she lay in the black-walnut bed that squarely divided the top-floor front, taking stock of what

promised to be her quarters for some months to come. The excitement of the arrival at Grand Central, together with all that followed, had completely absorbed her attention the day before. Mrs. Wilkins had been on hand to meet her, and somehow they had recognized each other immediately: who could fail to recognize Mrs. Wilkins? Then there were the engineering of her baggage to the house, unpacking to be done, the getting off of a note to Mr. Gonsalvo, the periodic meals in the gas-lit basement, and an afternoon siesta (if not quite the "little nap"—for sleep played truant—prescribed by her solicitous hostess). And finally, in the evening, Mrs. Wilkins, whose Byzantine youth had succumbed long since to the seductions of the theatre, had insisted on a "show," for which Helma paid her share, Mrs. Wilkins hers.

"It's too bad Mrs. Carter's gone on the road with 'Zaza,' " the worthy woman volunteered, as she guided her charge toward Broadway. "Anybody that's thinking about the stage, and I suppose you are, dear, shouldn't miss that. Mrs. Carter's what *I* call a great actress. And the play's a moral play, I don't care *who* thinks it isn't! But everybody says Miss Crossman's just fine in her new show—all about some king's sweetheart—real history, and I do enjoy history, when you see it acted right before you."

And now, after the crowded day of arrival and the joyous evening at the theatre, here she was settled in her own room, away up at the top of the big house. "Where you'll have all the quiet you want for your work," Mrs. Wilkins had reassuringly told her, which Helma had taken to mean "Where you won't disturb the other lodgers," for of course there was question of her practising.

Down in the murky, red-plush parlor of the first floor, she had espied an antiquated square piano.

"You can use that one, dear, until your own comes," Mrs. Wilkins had generously offered. "But you know, honeybunch, much as *I* should *love* to hear you sing just all day long, I can't on account of the other people. You know how

it is in a house like mine. The house *must* be quiet. That's the law I lay down first of all. And lots of them are real cranky, too. You'd *never* guess how cranky they are. Oh, it's no joke keeping a boardinghouse. That is, a good, respectable, *quiet* place like mine. So that's why I couldn't let you use this piano *all* the time. Though I wouldn't ask anything better for my own pleasure, dear. *You* understand, *I* know."

Helma thought of their own piano at Byzantium. It was square and it was old, but they had managed to keep it in tolerable repair. She found a discreet moment for examining Mrs. Wilkins's ancient specimen, but when she ran her fingers over its discolored keys, the sounds that issued in a reluctant response persuaded her not to pursue her investigation further. A few scales sung in her room proved that her voice was none the worse for the journey; within a day or two her own piano would be ordered; then she could buckle down to work.

Hers would be an upright, and from her bed she decided that it should stand at right angles to the more westward of the two tall windows that opened over the street below. The other furnishings might give evidence of long and unsparing wear, and the marble of the washstand might be stained and chipped, but the height of the ceiling and of the windows bespoke a certain grandeur in the architect's design, and the black walnut of bedstead, bureau, chairs, and table, and of the rickety what-not that reared its shaky pyramid of shelves in the eastern corner next the street were almost monumental in their respectability, and they, with the dingy moquette of the carpet, bore comforting witness to Mrs. Wilkins's zeal in keeping her house swept and dusted.

After all, this was no bad place to work in. The sunlight entered freely through the great windows, and it and she would make the top-floor front radiant with success.

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Promptly that afternoon Gonsalvo called. Helma met the Spaniard in the stuffy dusk of the red-plush parlor, which the sun's fiercest ray had a struggle to penetrate across a smother of imitation lace and bedraggled tapestry. She could have wished for a brighter, airier, ampler setting for this important meeting. She felt out of place and even put in the wrong amid the tarnish and decay of the Wilkins furniture. The luminous, if well-worn, comfort of the old house at Byzantium would obtrude its distracting memory.

The call was brief. From such a busy manager it could not be otherwise. The man who rose to greet her in the Wilkins half-light she took for a moment for a figure from the pages of the "Lyra Operatica." Then immediately she saw that he was no such insubstantial creature, but a very tangible specimen of the genus business-man, though not of a type familiar to the Middle West. He wore a dark suit whose cut and taste she was sure were beyond cavil, and his ready courtesy set her immediately at ease, even in the discordant surroundings. He was distinctly a man of presence, though not over medium height and blessed with only the reasonable robustness that testifies to strength, not fat. Doubtless he must be more than forty, she reflected, but there was scarcely a trace of gray in the deep brown of his hair and moustache, and the skin that covered his handsome, foreign face was as innocent of wrinkles as ivory. The dark eyes, set back a little under the fine arching of the brows, burned with an alert flame. There was something wolfish, she thought, as he turned their full gleam upon her, but such a benevolent wolf couldn't possibly wish her ill. Spinti's eyes, so different from other ocular exhibits of Byzantium, had kept their youthful fire even in old age. That must be the secret of these Latins. Exotic, alien—the eyes were too friendly, too real, for either word. She gave it up! But they were what she remembered best of Gonsalvo after the interview was over; they and the magnetic clasp of his large, white, well-shaped, amicable hand.

"I'm going to like Mr. Gonsalvo," she told herself. And

that made all the brighter the prospect of her great emprise.

He spoke cordially of Spinti, who, he declared, had done him a good turn once, twenty years before, in South America.

"I was young and poor, very," said the Spaniard meditatively. "I think what Spinti done for me then saved my life. Anyhow, I could never forget him or any friend he sent to me. And I can tell you, Spinti knows a voice. When Spinti recommends to me a young lady from the West, I understand he don't do it to waste my time," and his generous mouth relaxed into a corroborative smile, which, incidentally, revealed two unbroken ranks of gleaming teeth. Mr. Gonsalvo's English might not be perfect, she was thinking, but if all the Latins had such richness in their speaking voices, no wonder so many of their tribe could sing!

With the Maestro Dubosc (Helma noted the title and the name as Gonsalvo said them) he had made an appointment for her the following Monday at noon. Immediately Helma remembered her need of a piano and decided that she had better speak of it.

"This piano here I can't very well use on account of the other people in the house," she told him, "and, besides," she added confidentially, "it isn't in a bit good shape."

Gonsalvo gave the venerable instrument a quick glance that seemed to penetrate and search its spotted case.

"Of course you must have your own piano," he said, "a good modern upright," and, overriding Helma's sincere protest that she hadn't the slightest intention of putting the burden off on him, he insisted that he would attend to ordering it at once himself—"no trouble at all, a pleasure"—and assured her she could expect it some time the next morning. (Indeed, she was now certain she should like Mr. Gonsalvo!)

"Now, don't tire yourself out practising," was his farewell injunction. "Sing just enough every day so you'll be yourself when you sing for Dubosc. And don't be frightened of him beforehand. He's a very kind man and

very patient with his pupils. I will call for you Monday around eleven and take you up to his studio myself."

As he shut the street door, it came over Helma that he had not asked her to sing for *him*, or indeed questioned her in any way about her voice. How was that? she asked herself, in momentary disappointment. But immediately she recalled the warmth of his tribute to Spinti: if Spinti had meant half of what he used to say to her, he surely had given full details in his letters to Gonsalvo. And very likely Gonsalvo meant to be present when she sang for Dubosc. That probability, however, scarcely made the ordeal look easier; an ordeal she knew it must be, in spite of the genial manager's reassuring words. Still, she was bound and determined, now that she had actually come all the way to New York, not to behave like a terrified country-girl when she got up to sing before the eminent *Maestro* (she meticulously repeated to herself the title as Gonsalvo had spoken it).

Meantime, there was one thing to make clear to the solicitous and voluble Mrs. Wilkins beyond the possibility of any mistaking: that while she should be in the house, she would not be of it. She would take no part in the card games and other jollifications that she understood always had their place in boardinghouse life. As a matter of fact, cribbage, a taste for which her father had indulged even in noncard-playing Byzantium, was the only card game she knew at all.

In her gentlest words, and, she believed, with sufficient tact, she let Mrs. Wilkins know that she was in New York exclusively for work. Her evenings must be spent in study, for she knew that she should have to devote a good deal of time to languages as well as to music; in writing letters; in seeing the best plays, and sometimes in rest. She hoped Mrs. Wilkins would often go with her to the theatre. But no one must misunderstand the reasons that made it impossible for her to take a more active part in the general life of the household. So, having settled that matter, as she

hoped, once and for all, she mounted the three long flights of stairs to her room.

These stairs shared the noble proportions that constituted the lingering glory of the house. Even at midday they were dark, as were the halls. Children would be sure to think a lion crouched behind the bannisters ready to leap at any one who passed, or a bear was lying huddled on a landing where you could never make him out until grrrr—! you stumbled right into his shaggy coat! Helma laughed softly at this recollection of childish fancies. To her now they must be the friendliest of stairs.

CHAPTER III

The Spaniard, true to his word, was at the house at eleven Monday morning.

"Well, Miss Seymour, did your piano come all right?" he asked cheerfully as they met again amid the red-plush infirmities of the Wilkins parlor. Through the semi-dusk Helma caught the encouragement of his generous smile, and with a flash of joy in the discovery, knew that his buoyant way would help her through that nervous noon.

"There wasn't too much damage done," he was going on, "getting it up all those long flights of stairs? Sometimes, they have to hoist a piano up outside when the stairs are too narrow, and take it in through the window. . . The tuner came, did he, and you think the piano'll suit you? I told them to be sure and send a good one."

Helma set his mind at rest on all these points.

"And the voice, Miss Seymour?" Gonsalvo lowered his own voice, and his tones were confidential and caressing, reverent even, as though now he had reached that holy of holies the very mention of which was a matter of worshipful tenderness. "I hope nothing's the matter with the voice."

Helma, aglow at the question which he had asked at last, answered briskly that she thought not.

"*Ah, brava ragazza!*" he exclaimed. "*Bravissima!* . . .

You know Italian, don't you, Miss Seymour? . . . A little? . . . Oh, I'll bet, a good deal! My friend Spinti would attend to that. And some day you must learn some Spanish, too. They're almost the same; easy to mix up at the beginning; but Spanish isn't much use for singers, unless they're *Spanish*. . . Well, we go now, *Andiamo! Vamos!*"

Gonsalvo had a hansom waiting at the curb to take them to Dubosc's studio, which, he explained, was some distance away—"in the upper seventies," he said, without communicating thereby any exact meaning to Helma. But she observed with admiration how well-favored and well-groomed her escort looked in the full light of day. There was nothing "dudish," nothing at all freakish, she thought, nothing that hinted even remotely at the ways of Winfield Gaines, about the blue-black of his overcoat, with its narrow collar of velvet; his smooth black derby; his tan gloves, one of which he wore while he carried the other, or even his silver-headed mahogany walking-stick. And he moved with the quiet and substantial assurance of one who is at home in this big and complicated world, and finds it after all an easy place for a business-man who understands his business.

As they rolled comfortably up Fifth Avenue and then into the autumnal windings of Central Park, Gonsalvo, from his corner of the cab, called her attention to this and that with an enthusiasm which she recognized as properly New Yorkish and a knowledge of the city that seemed inexhaustible.

But though Helma was able to feign a polite interest in what he was so eagerly pointing out to her, she found as the ride progressed that she had less and less mind for hotels, churches, and the palatial strongholds of the rich. In spite of herself the thing was getting her. Gonsalvo's voice became little more than the buzzing of an amiably disposed bee; her replies had the mechanical emptiness of curtsies dropped by little girls to their mammas' callers. Opera . . . Career . . . These words were chanting in her

brain. They set her heart throbbing and seemed to catch her by the throat and then to grip that tender and essential avenue and hold it tight and dry as in a supreme test or trial by obstacle, until the horrid thought cast its shadow over her whole consciousness: "*Could* she sing?" . . . She found herself wishing the drive would continue forever, or else cease at once and let her have the agony over.

In due course the cab left the park, and, entering a brown-stone street at right angles to it, joggled up to the curb and stopped. Gonsalvo laid the warmth of his big, ungloved right hand on her arm and looked intently into her face as if he shared her emotion.

"This is the house," said he, and he snapped open the door of the cab and was out of it on the sidewalk with a feline agility and speed. Then he proceeded to help her out, as cautiously solicitous as if he were handling glass.

Her heart began beating with an added violence as they mounted the brown steps to the front door. When that opened at the touch of an elderly and shabby-looking man-servant, she knew she was glad of the Spaniard's substantial presence and his sustaining hand on her arm. Gonsalvo led her into the first room on the right of the hall. The servant shut the door to on them.

"Is that the Maestro's butler?" she inquired from among her heart-beats, not knowing why she asked such an unnecessary question.

"No," replied Gonsalvo, "he belongs to the house. The Maestro only has the rooms on the ground floor. He's not rich, the Maestro. He never made a fortune singing. He hadn't a great voice. Now he might take dozens of pupils, but he won't. He's too sincere. He takes just a few, only those that interest him, and he gives each one of them his whole attention. . . Listen!" Gonsalvo extended a spread-out hand as if quieting waters that he might be fording and stole up to the sliding doors which closed off another room.

At that moment a woman's voice, dark, rich, vibrant, sounded from the mysterious beyond. It was attacking a

piece of recitative from one of the older Italian operas; of so much Helma was certain, though she could not identify piece or opera. Gonsalvo dropped his hand and listened close up to the doors. She too listened. Twice the singing stopped, and twice began again. In each interval a man's spoken staccato sounded, but she could not catch his words. Meantime she found herself wondering if the inside of every house in New York were shabby. This green-rep parlor was like Mrs. Wilkins's red-plush parlor in that. The house was newer; it had not had time to become dingy; but distinctly it was worn, battered even.

At length the singing stopped. A rustle of speech replaced it. Gonsalvo came back to where Helma was sitting.

"That's Miss Dolores, a young contralto," he told her. "Dolores isn't her right name. But she means to have it for her name when she's a prima donna. She's an American, so of course she wants something foreign. I suppose you will." (Helma felt her neck suddenly hot with the dizzy expectation.) "*I* took Miss Dolores to Dubosc," he went on. "So I was anxious to hear what progress she had made. She seems to be doing well. It's a beautiful voice."

At this moment the street door of the house was audibly shut, and a few seconds later one half of the folding door at the end of the parlor slid back.

Helma knew her time had come. She was grasping the arms of her chair as if a dentist had picked up an excavator. Was it all a hoax, a silly dream—Spinti's predictions, Byzantium's wonderment, voice, career? . . . She gladly would have jumped up and fled from the house! . . .

Through the doorway she saw advancing into the parlor the tall figure of an elderly man whom she took to be Dubosc. Gonsalvo made her suspicion a certainty by rising and pronouncing words of introduction with a Spanish formality and a fullness that was all but ecclesiastical.

The Maestro, slim, iron-grey, attired in a maroon velvet

coat above his salt-and-pepper trousers and waistcoat, stooped over her hand and lightly touched it with his lips. His twirled moustache and the little tuft of beard beneath his lower lip recalled to her familiar steel engravings of the Second Empire. No mistake, Dubosc was distinguished.

"My good friend Gonsalvo has spoken to me of you in the highest terms, Miss Seymour." His voice was dry and incisive; his pronunciation faintly foreign, but meticulously exact. "I might almost say he has overflowed with enthusiasm. . ."

"But Mr. Gonsalvo hasn't heard me sing yet," murmured Helma.

"I can trust what Spinti has written me," put in the Spaniard hurriedly, as if to reassure her, and it seemed to her there was a great friendliness, even pride, in the eyes of the agent as they met hers. But she could not quite bear his gaze then. Even though it was foolish, she had to look down.

"Well, be that as it may," continued Dubosc, "I shall now have the honor of hearing for myself." And gallantly he offered his arm to Helma. "Just come in here," he added, leading the way toward the opened door. "And, Gonsalvo, you come too."

The other room, Helma saw at a glance, was the usual back parlor, transformed into a music-room or "studio," but lighted with unusual generosity from a big rear window opening on an inner court or garden. Pictures of musical worthies and signed photographs in frames literally covered the walls. Two ample cases held scores and sheet music. Before the grand piano, which occupied the farther corner to the right near the big window, a youngish, neutral-colored woman in a shirtwaist and a dark skirt was seated on the stool. She rose as they entered.

"Miss Seymour," said Dubosc, "I present you my accompanist, Miss Brockway . . . Miss Brockway," he added, "I have not yet heard Miss Seymour. Miss Sey-

mour, you don't mind beginning right away? Very well then. Just try some *arpeggi*, Miss Brockway. Begin at D, please."

Helma noted in her amazement that it was all done as promptly as on that October afternoon at Spinti's. Dubosc urged her gently to Miss Brockway's side and himself drew back. The accompanist obediently wheeled around and struck a chord. Helma, before she could realize that she was doing anything definite, opened her mouth and sang the arpeggio on D; and then on E, and then on F. She realized that she had turned as if to face an audience, which consisted of Dubosc, still standing and bent a little as if in the attitude of a courtly bow, a smile of quizzical attention on his lips, and behind him of Gonsalvo, who had seated himself on the very edge of a chair, and who, his handsome Latin head thrust forward and held in his cupped palms, was now looking at her with a stony gravity, his wide mouth enough open to show its two firm rows of white and solid teeth. Suddenly, a latent ferocity in that sight was too much for Helma. She faltered and stopped. The wicked little imps that had been teasing her in the cab as they had crossed the park now held her fairly, choking her throat dry. She looked from Dubosc to Gonsalvo in positive terror, mute.

"One moment, Miss Seymour," said Dubosc gently, straightening up and stepping toward her. "*Pardon*, Miss Brockway, *I'll* sit at the piano for a little. . . Now, look at me, Miss Seymour." He glanced up at her from the piano-stool with a smile that she could not but find heartening. "Now I'm going to improvise. Just follow along with your voice. Don't bother about anything. Just sing, or not sing, as you like. No life or death hangs on this morning's audition."

He struck a chord, and at the same time lifting his own voice—like Spinti's, a teacher's voice, her mind responded—began slowly the primary exercise of singing five-note scales. Helma joined with him immediately, the imps allowing her so much. On went Dubosc through a discreet

range. Then he changed the rhythm and played six-note scales. He would sing a little; then he would leave her voice without the support of his. Once he carried her voice well above the staff. Then he changed over to arpeggios. The imps at her throat were forgotten. She could feel a glad flush mantling through her body. She was as an athlete who stretches his limbs and tries his muscles, and then, glorying in his young strength, runs, drinking in the air and the sunshine in great lungfuls. Like a phoenix she rose from the ashes of her dread and soared strong and firm on her own poised wings.

Abruptly Dubosc stopped playing. His stopping was a shock, for she was now in full exhilaration.

"Enough of this, Miss Seymour," he said, rising from the piano-stool. "That will do for the limbering up. Now you will sing a song for us. Miss Brockway, I surrender the piano to you."

"But what shall I sing?" Helma, suddenly timid once more, dimly heard herself asking.

"What?" echoed Dubosc. "Let me see. What do you know? You know *'Caro nome,'* don't you?"

"Ye-es," answered Helma hesitantly.

"I understand," put in Dubosc, guessing the reason of her reluctance. "You think *Caro nome* isn't dramatic enough for your voice. Well, get rid of any prejudice of that sort. It has its basis in ignorance. The old singers knew better. Music seems to have a special affinity for fallacy. The most fatal I know in singing is the fallacy called specialization. Every note of *'Caro nome'* lies easily in your voice. And if you, with *your* voice, have the skill to sing *'Caro nome'* well, you'll never find any trouble in singing *'Ritorna vincitor!'* or any other of the dramatic arias. . . Come on, Miss Brockway," he called cheerily to the accompanist, "you have the 'Rigoletto' score there."

One detail of Dubosc's professional harangue stood out in her mind like a glowing coal ". . . lies easily in your voice" . . . Again imps were clutching at her throat-strings,

but a fierce pride shot through her veins and nerves. Under Miss Brockway's fingers the piano had begun the tinkling minor of the introduction, and in the original high key. What of that! *"Gualtier Maldè, nome di lui si amato. . ."* Helma was singing the battle-scarred piece without thought of check or hindrance, as a happy swimmer breasting and surmounting friendly surges.

When, aglow with the greedy joy of her own activity, she reached the cadenza, she gave it as it stands in Verdi's score, no added embroideries, but the top B natural, C natural, C sharp, bold and full, and a long trill, swelled and diminished, on the D below them. She paused. Would the Maestro want the little repeat where Gilda, candle in hand, goes up the stairs to the vanishing trill on E? She stood silent, expectant. But Dubosc said nothing, nor did he stir from the attitude of contemplation he had assumed, lying deep back in an armchair, the tips of his slim fingers pressed against one another above his chest, and one thin leg swinging idly across the other. It was Gonsalvo that broke the yoke of silence with a sort of low, sibilant exultation, and he beat his palms together gently, as if fearful of disturbing a spell.

"Per-fect-ly splendid!" half whispered the drabbish Miss Brockway, weighing hard on each syllable of the adverb, as she gazed up with an unconcealed admiration into Helma's face. "I can't help saying it," she added under her breath, in a little flurry, as if she feared she had exceeded her strictly limited rights as a mere accompanist. Meanwhile Dubosc still said nothing, but he got up and came forward and took both of Helma's hands in his and bent his gaunt face toward hers and seemed with his steely eyes to bore into the secret places of her brain. After a further moment of speechlessness, in which her heart broke anew into a wild thumping, he deliberately said his say:

"I understand why your master at Bizerta—no, I mistake —Byzantium, is it not?—Of course, Byzantium! City of those beautiful, *savantes*, and sometimes, I fear, very wicked

ladies—but you, my dear Miss Seymour, I can see that you are a veritable Irène amongst them, dedicated by God and your devout master to the only and true faith!"—Helma, however impatient of this flowery excursion into history, felt constrained to smile politely at the Maestro's humorous delay; Gonsalvo's features expressed a relishing pleasure in the luxurious intimations of Dubosc's words, though something fiercely told her that the Spaniard had not the faintest notion of the older man's lettered allusions—"I understand why your master at Byzantium," Dubosc, having settled the crux of the name, continued, "is so enthusiastic. Without doubt your voice deserves enthusiasm." He dropped her hands and made a little bow. His courtesy was taking the official tone of a proclamation. "And I can say this for your former master: he has done nothing to injure the voice. Indeed, I think he has trained it very well—that is, as far as he has gone with you. There are still some little roughnesses to file off—nothing that is his fault or yours. And then style and répertoire are largely before you, I assume. Have you ever memorized an opera rôle all through?"

Helma answered that she had not, though she had studied parts of several operas.

"Very good; that will have its turn soon," went on Dubosc. "Of course, I can't judge from this one hearing, when of necessity you are nervous, just what your natural aptitude is. You may be easy to teach and—you will pardon my complete frankness—you may not be. We *maîtres de chant* are like physicians in this; we have first to make the diagnosis and then adapt the treatment to the case—that is, those of us who know our business." He paused significantly, and then resumed: "But I think I already discern in you what I call a gift" (Spinti's word!) . . . "A gift is rare. . . Nothing else is quite so rare, not even a natural voice as good as yours." Again Dubosc made her a little bow, and in his gesture and his smile there was the satisfaction of a connoisseurship that had gone on record.

Helma had heeded his words, in spite of the tumult that

her blood was making in all her arteries. They were words she might have dreamed. *Had* he spoken them?

Dubosc left her no time for speculation.

"Now for the practical side of it." He had picked the "Rigoletto" score from the music rack and was snapping the worn edges of its pages back and forth with his fingers of his right hand. "If I am to teach you at all, I want you for the present twice a day, for you must promise me not to sing a note except when you are with me. In due time, perhaps very soon, I shall be able to trust you to yourself for practising, but not these first days; not until I'm thoroughly acquainted with your vocal habits and really know you as a worker. Each lesson will only last half an hour. To-morrow you can come at ten-thirty. Then we will decide on the later half hour. For the rest of your time, take walks, get to know New York, visit the picture galleries, see good plays and observe carefully the acting. Acting in opera and acting in drama are not the same thing, but the latter can always teach the former. And you must study on languages, the useful side of them. I notice your Italian is surprisingly good, but you must keep working at it. I will recommend you teachers for Italian and for French. Only, don't tire yourself out with this big programme I am sketching for you. The voice is not a man-made instrument. It is something that lives, and the most sensitive and easily fatigued of living things the moment you abuse it . . . Well, come to me to-morrow. We will begin our work in earnest then. At ten-thirty to-morrow."

Out in the noonday sunshine in the empty street Helma stood dazzled. For a moment what she saw was the façade of Dubosc's house . . . flat slabs of chocolate applied . . . points and dormers . . . a little fancy . . . recent . . . flimsy . . . not massive, rockhewn, like Mrs. Wilkins's. . . Then the memory of what had just been came flooding, swamped all the rest. She had an impulse to leap, to run, to shout for very joy. But the shadow of a misgiving had intervened between her and the sun.

The Spaniard was quick to detect her trouble.

"We'll walk over toward the park and perhaps down a little way," he said in his soothing voice. "You're not tired, are you? . . . All right! After we've walked a little we'll get into a hansom and I'll take you for a Spanish lunch. That will help along what the Maestro calls seeing New York. But if you *are* tired, I'll drive you right back to your house now."

Of course Helma declared that she was not tired. As a matter of fact, nothing could have been more opportune than this unexpected invitation. But there was one burning question which she longed to ask of Gonsalvo, and the intuitive Latin had divined it. Nevertheless, with an ingrained leisureliness that she was coming to recognize as his habit, he took his time about answering. First he lighted a cigarette, which was easy enough to do in the still air.

"You don't mind if I smoke now that we are out of doors?" he asked with a deliberation that was positively exasperating in Helma's mute anxiety.

The compliment implied to the voice, to the singer, just then could mean nothing to her but delay. She was used to men smoking, indoors or out. That wasn't anything at all. But one thing she *did* want to know, and right away; Gonsalvo could tell her. What she said to him, however, was only a "Certainly not; smoke never bothers me," which she meant should sound scrupulously civil in spite of her impatience.

"Well," said Gonsalvo, measuring his words between puffs, but coming to the point at last, "you know, you've made a hit with Dubosc." (Ah, *now* she might know!) "He doesn't talk like he did to you to everybody that comes to his studio. In fact, I never heard him talk like that before to anybody, and he never played for anybody himself. He wasn't so good by a long shot to that contralto you heard there, that Miss Everell or Miss Dolores. Dubosc knows he's found a jewel in your voice, and he knows exactly what to do with that kind of a jewel. . . Nobody, positively

nobody, like the Maestro! You're what I call a pretty lucky kid!" Gonsalvo seized her right hand, and, bowing, carried it to his lips, holding it there a moment in spite of her glove. In her elation she could have hugged him!

"I can tell you I'm really proud to be the one to present you," he added, and the Spaniard's generous smile flashed at her across the bland sunlight. How boyish he was, this man, who might in years have been her father; how pleasantly foreign and how very considerate of her! And she thought of that other autumn afternoon, four years earlier, the faintly pungent perfume of the Indian summer; Bertha, insistent, not to be denied; the neat, white, two-story house that sheltered the strange little professor and the shivering chandelier. . . Suppose she had *not* gone in with Bertha. What toys we are in the sport of destiny! But if she had not gone in that day, she surely would another day. . . At Dubosc's nobody had been quite so effusive, but she now felt sure their softer words had meant as much. And really, for all the difference in the manners, the two visits were singularly alike.

CHAPTER IV

It was to a Spanish boardinghouse, much farther downtown, that Gonsalvo drove Helma for luncheon. They entered through a grille under the front steps, and the shut-in, gas-lit basement diningroom—a room like Mrs. Wilkins's, and so unlike!—gave the girl a curious feeling of an Iberian seclusion in the heart of New York. But she enjoyed the yellow rice with wings and joints of chicken, like a thicker, different fricassée; the crackling breadsticks, the snowy slices of cream cheese lying side by side with brown, opaque slices of guava paste. . . Guava jelly, guava paste; how the names stemmed back to childhood's reading! She had known those sweetmeats all her life without ever tasting either.

Gonsalvo offered her wine from the pint bottle that he had ordered for himself. Byzantium within her interposed

objection, and she declined, just a little confusedly, she felt. But she watched its topaz dance within Gonsalvo's glass as the reflection of the gas burner at the slightest jarring sprang and leaped like a merry demon. The tables were only partly occupied, and Gonsalvo seemed to know all the lunchers—brown men chiefly, exotic, intriguing; men slim and with lambent, darting eyes, who chattered across at one another from table to table, back and forth, in a volatile, sibilant language of which she scarcely recognized a word. Once in a while Gonsalvo said something to her in English, but, by accident or with a discerning tact, he left her mainly to herself and to the enjoyment of the unaccustomed scene in a healthy body's sweet relaxation, which now followed the ordeal and triumph at Dubosc's. Lazily she observed the vivid foreign men, half fascinated by their unfamiliar presence, and pleasantly aware that her escort was easily the handsomest.

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An hour later Helma lay flat out on her bed in the top floor front at Mrs. Wilkins's. The shabby furniture had taken on a homely intimacy in the pleasant afternoon light. She saw the polished darkness of the upright piano standing solid and indicative against the farther wall at right angles to the windows. Then she gazed up at the soiled white of the ceiling, at the circle of plaster modelling that surrounded the tarnished bronze of the semi-decrepit gas fixture. The street below sent up no sound. She lay quite still in the silence of her thought.

But that was peopled as the long mirror had been in the days of Byzantium. Byzantium . . . Already it seemed as remote in time as it was in space. Through her mind filed heroines of opera in an enthralling procession: Aïda, Leonora, Donna Anna, Valentine, Semiramide, Norma, even the women of Wagner that the "Lyra Operatica" had slighted and her old professor half denied. Dared she believe it, from now on they were hers, hers!

Gaines had taught her the Valkyrie cry, and now she could see herself buckled in the glistening armor of the maiden Brünnhilde, shouting the challenge of her "*Ho-jo-to-ho!*" to the applauding peoples of the earth. Lying flat out on her back, she had the impulse to shout it in her joy right then and there, the hurricane blast of those upward portamentos, the tearing top-notes, shriek of trill, and all! But the stern injunction of Dubosc imposed its veto. Not one note save in his presence!

For, after all, it was not those noble dames who controlled her throat, much less the little demons of that nervous noon; it was the greater and deeper, the containing, comprehending entity; it was her career. And, reaching out to whatever gods might be, Congregational, Episcopalian, the shadowy deity of Winfield Gaines, the dreamed, incarnate Word, she vowed herself, turning and twisting upon her bed in Mrs. Wilkins's shabby upper chamber, her hands clasped tight at full arm-stretch above her head, to the career, the purpose, the thing greater than any cabined churchly deity, that should be her life, herself!

The image of the father and the mother *would* enter the picture. But the daughter set them off at a benign distance in their attitude of a delighted approbation. Something in her forbade even in thought a closer impingement on this life that was so ravenously her own. But certainly her father and mother would approve . . . And Gaines . . . Agnes . . . No, she could not bear to think of Agnes on this day of days. . . But Gaines. . . She really ought to write to Gaines.

First of all, however, she must write to Spinti. Yes, and at once. So far she had put him off with a picture post-card of the Aquarium, where Jenny Lind had sung because it could hold so many people. . . And later she must write to Bertha. . . Of course to Bertha, but for whose insisting that October day. . .

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Helma could not avoid telling Mrs. Wilkins in a general way what had occurred at Dubosc's, though to talk of it at all was as yet like exposing the secret ways of holiness to profane eyes. But she was not altogether sorry when she saw the unfeigned pleasure which the worthy woman had in the good fortune of her fledgling boarder.

It was with unmistakable affection that Mrs. Wilkins kissed her goodnight down in the red-plush parlor.

"This has certainly been a big day for my girlie!" she cooed. "Now sleep good and sound. You've earned it, dearie. Pleasant dreams!"

The solitary gas-jet between the windows that Helma lighted in her upper room in preference to tampering with the clumsiness of the chandelier left the corners shadowy and threw deep gulfs of darkness into the abysses of the looking-glass, which tilted toward her from the old black-walnut bureau—the maid must have loosened the screws that held it. Adjusting the mirror to a gentler angle, she set about undressing.

She looked sharply at the reflection of her throat in the glass, at its milk-white surface and firm, clearly articulated lines. Why should this throat, not another, encase a voice? With her hand she felt the cleanness of its modelling. Would it ever grow fat, develop the horror of a double chin? There were vigor and decision in her shoulders under the clinging softness of their curves. Her arms, as she raised them to let down her hair, would not have been puny for a viking's daughter; might their strength one day become obese and jellied? She broke into a soft little laugh of amusement; all that seemed at this moment so impossibly remote!

Her hair now hung behind her in a dusky mass, the sickly flame from the gas-jet kindling its edges to gold. In a fine, burnished coronal the rim of light circled her head like a thin halo of a mosaic saint . . . Byzantium! . . . She had seen such heads in the history books . . . Irène! . . . Dubosc's word flashed back to her. He had said Eerenn. . .

"Beautiful, *savantes*, and sometimes, I fear, very wicked ladies. . ."

Hypnotically she had let fall her last garment. What a Godiva's mantel was her hair! . . . She lifted her arms again and clasped her hands behind her head. All the fresh and tempered beauty of her young body stood there in its ripe virginity, in a spotless, unpretending, undeprecating pride. Detached, appraising, she examined the reflected image with an unsparing connoisseurship. Not one keen line softening to sensuousness, nor the concession of a single yielding curve escaped the rigor of her gaze. . . "I can see that you are a veritable Eerenn amongst them, dedicated by God and your devout master to the only and true faith." She heard again the Maestro's courtly syllables. And Gonsalvo had only partly understood . . . Gonsalvo! . . .

She felt the room grown chilly and that she was naked. Seizing any garment from the floor, she hugged it tightly against her and sped to the gas-jet to pluck away its flaming eye, in shivering terror at her wantonness. . .

"Beautiful, *savantes*, and sometimes . . ." The lying tongue of evil filled the place with mockery. . . "And finally to beat down Satan under our feet" . . .

CHAPTER V

The two lessons a day began to Helma's almost childlike delight and wonder. Then an old French lady, the widow of a "*Professeur de langues*," who had known Dubosc since his first day in New York, started coming twice a week to drill her in French diction ("*le français tel qu'on le parle à la Comédie Française, ma chérie*"). And drill her this rustling, white-haired despot of a cherished native speech ("*une femme si bonne, si digne!*") did, interminably, in the mysteries of the close and the open E, and of that fragile, volatile R, atremble on the tongue's tip, which in singing must neither "*grasseyer*" as Parisians choke it in the throat, nor yet trill blatantly after the vulgar manner of the Italians.

Helma recalled with a sort of tender glee those distant evenings on the vine-draped verandah in Byzantium when they all had joined in the merry game of counting "cat," "sank," "wheat."

As for Italian, a language which the old French lady made no secret of despising, Dubosc, remarking that he knew Tuscan like a Florentine, and two or three of the dialects besides, ruled that for the present the Italian of her singing-lessons would suffice.

Her morning singing-lesson happened to overlap Miss Everell's, and Dubosc spoke relishingly of the time when the two of them might expect to sing together in "Aïda," in "Il Trovatore," in "Lohengrin," and perhaps, if they were especially good and attentive pupils, in "Semiramide." On these morning lessons Gonsalvo found the leisure to drop in more than once, and one day he again took Helma to luncheon at the Spanish boarding-house, with the added promise, most cordially proffered, that before long he would introduce her to a "genuwine Eyetalian dinner." That was really his "kitchen," the Italian "kitchen," he explained to her, for, his wife being an Italian woman, it was naturally the way they ate at home. And what with his family and the constant associations of his business, particularly the operatic people, he had grown to feel himself quite as much an Italian as a Spaniard. "But I believe I'm a pretty good American, too," he added, making the patriotic *amende*. "Anyhow, it ain't every born American that gives his country six youngsters as I've done, and good, healthy kids, every one of them!"

So this Gonsalvo was a married man with a family of children! The information thus casually imparted came to Helma as something of a shock. To be sure, she told herself, it was the most natural thing imaginable. But in the world of wonder that she had inhabited since reaching New York Gonsalvo had seemed to her aroused fancy a sort of supernatural being, unencumbered with earthly ties and trammels. Now she learned from his own lips that he was

only clay with the rest—though in her eyes his glaze continued perceptibly brighter. And the fact that Gonsalvo was (as Byzantium would have put it) a family man, even if it robbed him of glamour, imparted a certain homely intimacy to his spruce presence and flattering kindliness. Thus she found herself gathering a comfortable confidence in this musical Latin, whom hitherto she had regarded almost as a fascinating specimen of exotic fauna.

But the embarrassing thought intruded, rather from her reading than from any hint lodged in Byzantine experience: Was it quite proper that a young girl should accept these luncheons from a married man? Unnecessary as such a scruple seemed in this case, she felt that she ought to ask an opinion of some one wiser than herself. But of whom? Of Mrs. Wilkins? How should poor, panting Mrs. Wilkins know anything about such matters? . . . No, she had better ask Dubosc. But even that expedient seemed awkward. Still she could perhaps find a way without putting the question to him point-blank.

As a matter of fact, the opportunity came the next day. Dubosc was exercising Helma in scales at her morning lesson when the house-servant rapped at the hall-door of the studio. It seemed there was a lady at the telephone who insisted on speaking to the Maestro himself and would not be put off. The Frenchman turned pleadingly to his accompanist:

"You go answer for me, like an angel, Miss Brockway. I'll wager it's that woman I heard yesterday afternoon. I simply won't spend my time on her. If it is she, tell her anything you can invent to get rid of her. Might begin with the truth, though, that I've got all the pupils now I can do justice to this year. But anything at all to get rid of her."

When Miss Brockway had shut the door into the hall he explained to Helma: "She's one of these women with a mania for singing and not the smallest spark of talent. But what's a detail like talent when you imagine you're Patti

and Lehmann in one! What the poor thing needs is not a vocal teacher, but an alienist. I couldn't quite say so to her, but all of Monte Cristo's money wouldn't persuade me to lose precious time trying to teach her things she could never learn when I might be training a Miss Seymour!" He pointed the compliment with a gallant little nod.

Her pleased but half-deprecating laughter Dubosc interrupted with an accusing finger: "But there's just one thing, my dear young lady. I understand you're getting to be quite a connoisseur in Spanish cooking. Now, beware! Nobody ever lost weight on a Spanish diet, or an Italian either. Not that *you* need to lose weight, but I don't want to see you putting it on and ruining your nice trim figure. Not yet awhile! There are altogether too many singers of the genus elephant in opera now without adding Helma Seymour to the number." And Dubosc drew in his breath with a long whistle of mock horror at such an appalling idea.

Helma saw her chance. "Isn't Mrs. Gonsalvo supposed to be a wonderful cook?" she asked.

"Mrs. Gonsalvo? Who ever told you anything about Mrs. Gonsalvo? For all I know she's a *cordon bleu,* or maybe she doesn't cook at all."

Helma felt she could not accept this fragmentary answer as final.

"Then *you* haven't eaten her cooking?" she persisted, though fearful lest she appear too curious.

"I? Why, no! What should make you suppose I had? Doubtless there *is* a Mrs. Gonsalvo. It seems to me I've even been told she inhabits Flatlands or Flatbush or some other interesting suburb of the borough of Brooklyn, busily rearing a baby a year. Those Dagos—but, pardon me, he's a Spaniard—are scrupulously heedful of the divine command to increase and multiply. But, poor lady, nobody that I've heard of has ever seen her over here."

The accompanist had come back into the room wearing a demure look of satisfaction.

"Well, Miss Brockway?" asked Dubosc, switching sharply from Mrs. Gonsalvo.

"It was just as you thought, Maestro," his ambassadress reported. "But I don't think the woman will come around bothering you again."

"Why, what *did* you do to her?" questioned the Maestro in assumed terror.

"I only gave her to understand positively that you haven't the time. It took a little while to convince her, but she knows it now."

"Good girl!" exclaimed Dubosc. "That's settled! . . . By the way, Miss Seymour just now asked me something about Mrs. Gonsalvo." Miss Brockway permitted herself a discreet smile. "Regretfully I had to tell her we don't know the lady. Wouldn't you say Gonsalvo was for all good purposes quite as much a bachelor as I am? Technically I'm not just that, but when a man's been a widower for more than twenty years he almost qualifies."

"Quite as much a bachelor, I should say," affirmed Miss Brockway, and a glint in her eyes very like malice cut across the prim precision of her words. "Can she be envious somehow?" occurred to Helma. "Oh, no! . . ."

Miss Brockway had resumed her place on the piano stool.

"Well, we'll go on with the lesson," Dubosc announced.

Helma obediently attacked her scales. And she felt that probably, for a city like New York, her questionings had been sufficiently answered. At any rate, she continued to lunch with Gonsalvo.

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Of course, these many lessons, Helma realized, would mean a severe drain on her patrimony. But what, after all, had she come to New York for? And Dubosc was certainly very kind. He charged her well for his instruction, but by no means what she felt he might have charged her. She made bold to speak of these matters to Gonsalvo.

"You can trust Dubosc," the Spaniard answered her seri-

ously. "He knows he has a prize filly in you. Of course he will take a little commission on you later on. But for the present his one big interest is to get your voice in shape and you launched in opera. . . Oh," he continued, with a significant lifting of his eyebrows and nodding of his head, "we'll launch you all right!"

At the end of the first fortnight Dubosc changed his procedure. He told Helma that the two weeks' work had proved to him conclusively not only that Spinti had done nothing to hurt her voice, but that he had trained it so well and so thoroughly that on the technical side there remained little more to be done.

"Yours is a gifted throat," was Dubosc's encouraging dictum. "You will get off with less than the classical seven years of study. There's still a little polishing needed, and there's always the keeping everlastingly at technique that must never let up as long as you will sing, that is, if you mean to remain your life through a real Dubosc pupil. And for the rest of the story, as I told you the first time you sang for me, style and répertoire."

He thereupon laid out a nucleus of operas that she was to memorize in full—music, action, *mise-en-scène,* everything —since Dubosc stood ready to prepare a pupil for the stage in all respects. Then there were other operas that he proposed to go over with her so that she might have firm bases of understanding and tradition whenever she should be called upon to get them up for performance. The lessons from now on were to be one a day, but each lesson would fill a full hour, and study and practice at home were also prescribed.

"Of course," Dubosc told her, "you might easily take a church position and even begin some little concert work in nearby towns, but if you are well enough supplied with money, I advise you not to. That would merely divert you from the main issue and take up valuable time and strength. The present is your golden moment for study and nothing but study, provided your means permit it."

Helma assured him that they did. So by the middle of October she almost dared regard herself as a prima donna in everything but the stage experience. If ever a doubt now darkened her dream of happiness, it was quickly sent flying by the comments of the few whom Dubosc allowed to hear her sing, and by a happy certainty, deep down within herself, that what she was giving was the inevitable splendid thing that nature, God, the universe, had designed, decreed, that she should give. And her joy in its still profundity passed her understanding. Her career, for such she felt it now as by a second nature, had become almost the animal contentment of a perfect physical functioning. To sing was to live, and to live was happiness. Even the perceptibly petty tinge of the letters from the western parish could not dim the abounding radiance of those mid-autumn days.

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Each lesson with Dubosc was a visit to a world of enchantment, a fruition of all that she had glimpsed in the tall mirror on the wall at home. Actually she felt herself Assyria's queen, stepping toward the footlights from amongst her slaves for the glittering proclamation of "*Bel raggio lusinghier*"; Norma, preaching peace unto her people and invoking the tranquil influence of the moon; Aïda, longing for the distant azure of her native skies. . .

As for Wagner, Dubosc was chary of him with young voices, but he did work with her on Elsa's two solos and Elisabeth's greeting to the hall of song, though for these he insisted as yet on the Italian vocables.

Such lessons were to her the living, audible magic. Yet once in a while she would still turn to Dubosc, momentarily incredulous. Could this be she, could this be he, was it New York, with Europe, more and more the land of heart's desire, only across a strip of sea? Or was the whole thing a childish make-believe back in Byzantium?

But when working at her scales and vocalises, or when again and again she went through some piece of stage busi-

ness till Dubosc pronounced himself satisfied (for he was dwelling now increasingly on the dramatic side of the lessons), or when busily annotating a score (he was a martinet about that too), she had no doubt that she was in New York and hard at work. And when a moment of discouragement did catch her unaware, then Dubosc was like a pillar of adamant.

"Your career is certain," he would say, "absolutely assured. What you must do is to make it the perfect thing it ought to be. Maybe we can't any of us achieve quite that. But you can come mighty near it, my little Helma" (the formal "Miss Seymour" had vanished in the first days). "You have the stuff to work with, and, then, you are not a frivolous creature like those vain little scatterbrains whose poor heads are completely turned by the first success that comes along. The big thing about you is that *you* know how to work. It is in you, like your voice and your lungs. *You* needn't worry about the *end* of your work, only about the *how*."

Yes, she did know how to work. How could she help it, with a career standing always over her, a task-master unseen, but unrelenting. And then, when Dubosc talked to her of the "great singing," of what that singing must mean in Donna Anna, Norma, Semiramide, Lucrezia Borgia, the Leonoras, and Aïda and Desdemona too, and of how she must carry it on to Wagner, when the time should come for Elsa and Elisabeth, and after them Venus and Sieglinde, and even Isolde and the Brünnhildes—then the career was no longer the colossus stooping to incarnation in woman's flesh, nor yet a portrait gallery of great *prime donne* to which one more royal image must now be affixed; it was a cathedral, austere and imperious, down whose shadowy aisles streamed incense from that altar where daily, hourly, burned the sacrifice that art exacts from every votary. In these moments she was the humbled vessel of the flame. But Dubosc would pull her back to quotidian realities.

"Of course, Helma, you must go slow with Wagner at the

first, but some day what a Venus! You'll make a siren's song out of her angular phrases, rounding and softening them to grace because *you'll* know how to sing, and with that fine blonde head and body of yours, you'll look a goddess too!"

He spoke as he might of the perfect facture of a race horse. Indeed, she felt that Dubosc regarded her much as a horseman regards a prize animal. Gonsalvo's word "filly" had stuck in her memory. And she was gratefully, if only dimly, aware that no carnal hint troubled the expert connoisseurship of the affectionate solicitude.

Her days were thus ever and ever busier. The career in making so filled her time that she came scarcely to remember that she was happy. Once in a while the thought did break loose and flood her being. Then she wrote to Spinti, but only a few words. Something held her back from writing much. Was it a lingering fear before Byzantium that all might not turn out just so? And, anyway, when emotion is so strong, speech is likely to be poor. Occasionally she had to write to Agnes, but little joy went into those "letters home," as Agnes never failed to call them, though Helma saw no conceivable home for herself in that far-western parsonage. It was another existence, toward which neither curiosity nor sentiment now drew her. But at times she could not suppress a little shudder at the transient dread that if anything went wrong with her, she might have no choice but to seek refuge there. . .

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Through all these busy days Gonsalvo hovered near like a kindly spirit of encouragement and help. It was surprising how often he managed to visit Dubosc's studio, far though it was from his office, and listen to a part of a lesson. He had always the same cheerful excuse; he was "watching over his budding artists." The luncheons with Helma at the Spanish boarding-house became a weekly institution. Gonsalvo still spoke of the "genuwine Eyetalian dinner" as a future certainty, but he seemed in no hurry to

set the date. Helma wondered, in spite of Dubosc's facetious word on the unseen household out in Brooklyn, whether Gonsalvo's Italian dinner might not after all happen in his own home. Perhaps she should prove to be the first person honored with an invitation to make that pilgrimage!

Gonsalvo, genial though he looked, did not talk a great deal, and Helma found sympathetic companionship in his silences as well as in his speech. There was something pleasant, even velvety, about the man's Latin presence. Might not some remote, forgotten ancestor of his have borne a crouching leopard as device? For there was an almost purring softness in the intervals between his speaking. Then at a word he could leap into life with a feline alertness and fire. Sometimes, though, Helma would recall that when first she saw him it was nothing feline, but a wolf, that he had suggested! . . . Be all that as it might, the Spaniard was never anything but kindness incarnate toward his musical godchild, as one day he called her. Sometimes she glanced up suddenly and surprised his look riveted on her as if he would learn every atom of her fabric. Such intensity of regard, she reflected, might have been uncomfortable, if she had not known how benevolently it was meant. At Dubosc's she occasionally heard an allusion to his reputation for sharpness and cunning in business, "like every successful manager," the Frenchman had the grace to add. But the hidden claws of the leopard she had never seen unsheathed, and the wolf was so lamb-like among his friends.

There undoubtedly existed some sort of understanding that when the time should be ripe, Gonsalvo would take her officially under his expert direction. But he had not yet made her a definite proposition to that effect, much less offered her a contract. She noticed that Dubosc often bridled a bit in the Spaniard's presence. Though the Frenchman's strict canon of courtesy would never admit the breach of the spoken word, he did indicate, in little tacit ways which Helma could not fail to catch, that he regarded Gonsalvo as a being who moved on a distinctly lower plane than that in-

habited by his own artistic and cultivated self, with his richer background of travel and life in many lands.

Still, Dubosc was observed to beam with parental favor on the interest which Gonsalvo took in his pupils, some of whom, of course, he owed to the solicitous manager's advice. As for Helma, she found a little private amusement in her teacher's slight, but unmistakable, hints of superiority, which must none the less, she was persuaded, be coupled with a genuine esteem, in spite of those jocular allusions to the Spaniard's exceeding deftness in handling his business. For example, Dubosc significantly said to her one day:

"Gonsalvo is not the man to waste his time any more than I am. If you don't believe what old Dubosc tells you because you know he's an enthusiast and fear he's a crank, you can trust the matter to your man of business. He knows how to pick a winner, too, and he's picked you."

It was undeniable that Gonsalvo had singled her out for flattering attention. She knew of his taking Miss Everell to luncheon once or twice, and Miss Everell's behavior on more than one occasion indicated to the unerring intuition of womankind that she would have liked the gallant manager to ask her for luncheon oftener! But there seemed to be no mistaking where the manager's preference lay, and that unspoken fact eventually went further toward heartening Helma in the moment of recurring doubt than any sanguine word uttered by Dubosc, the trainer. Gonsalvo, hard-headed and knowing well his affairs, would not be a man to waste his time!

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Helma's own time, she soon found—and how inexpressibly prosaic and even trivial any of the possible every-day impingements had come to seem!—could not be devoted totally to the absorbing work. There entered in these October days the unavoidable question of dress. Although the mourning for her parents automatically limited her to simplicity and black, nevertheless there was now a real evening gown to be

procured, and an opera cloak. For shortly the Metropolitan season would open, and Dubosc intended that with its opening she should begin immediately her hearing of opera. So now Helma tasted the experience of shopping in the great stores of New York, and to her surprise she soon found she was taking to this particular interruption of the work with a properly feminine relish.

When her first night of opera arrived, Mrs. Wilkins declared that she looked "perfectly stunning" in her black lace evening-dress, and Dubosc himself, her eager escort, paid her one of his gracious compliments.

The Frenchman sniffed the air of the opera house like a hunter keen for the quarry, and every note that was sung or played became matter for his examination and appraisal. He was twice as excited, Helma observed, over his pupil's first opera as she was herself. Indeed, the opera that she had lived in for so long had been an ideal of her own ardent visioning, and fine as even Dubosc admitted much of the "Faust" before them to be, she was aware in its reality of a disenchantment which she made no attempt to define. Although she strove to play up buoyantly to Dubosc's astute enthusiasms and whimsical keenness of censure, he at length detected her disappointment.

"But, my child," he said abruptly, as they sat waiting for the prison scene, "I can see that this isn't all you believed it would be."

"Oh, yes, it certainly is, and more. . ."

"No, no, you can't deceive your old Dubosc; his eyes are sharp. . . But the thing will get you yet, get you and hold you." He smiled at her with gay sagacity. "And to-night's is a pretty good performance, even if somehow it isn't quite what you expected. We shall go often to the opera now; there are things I can teach you here in a jiffy which in the studio would take days—things to avoid like mortal sin, as well as many things to copy."

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Dubosc was insistent about her going to certain concerts as well as to the opera. She must, for her general musical education, hear the best of the pianists, violinists, and 'cellists, and all of the Boston Symphony concerts. Most important as a model for sustained phrasing, he declared, was the long sweep of the strings of a first-rate orchestra, and that vocalist would have to be proficient indeed who could learn nothing more of the possibilities of legato from a solo fiddler like Ysaye. On particular grounds there were several singers, among them Sembrich, Melba, and Lilli Lehmann, whom she should study closely, for here, he said, was the concrete demonstration of the art that he was teaching. . . And always he sat beside her like a tutelary dragon, guarding his precious hoard, ready to comment and to guide.

With all this there were moments when she turned from the magic of her career to the other magic of the world that lay about her. Then she threw the weight of learning to the watchful deities, and alone, unthinking, by herself, had just the native, untaught joy of autumn in New York. In sun, or in rain, she went as one lost, a stranger in the city, a stranger, but knowing her way out, eagerly, stepping off into her beloved "old New York," as she now thought of the tranquil streets between Fourteenth and Washington Square, streets which still preserved untouched the noble air of something that always had been and always should be. How soft they were in the waning sunlight, how friendly their houses with an inner warmth and comfort under the rain! Dared she hope some day to live in one of them herself? And the autumn air, mild or bracing or charged with gusty showers, was a divine aliment to her cheeks, her hands, her avid nostrils, the hardy youth and soundness of her lungs. . . More than once from these random explorations she returned with a definite feeling of being closer to her goal.

CHAPTER VI

THE promised Italian dinner did not occur until after New Year's. And then it had a definitely festal excuse. Gonsalvo invited his guests in honor of Dubosc's birthday—his fiftieth, the Maestro graciously permitted them to call it, adding with an arch demureness:

"We singers are never less than a good five years behind the clock."

The Spaniard organized what he termed a "genuwine party" for the occasion. He asked first of all the Maestro's two star pupils—Helma and Miss Everell—and he amiably included Miss Brockway and her young sister, a shrinking, wide-eyed creature on her first marvelling visit to New York. A local manager from a western city, an assistant conductor from the Metropolitan Opera (one of his "artists," Gonsalvo said with the almost religious seriousness with which he always touched on matters of business), and a basso who had sung small parts with Dubosc in Europe twenty years before, all three Italians.

"He used to know your first *maestro*, Spinti," Dubosc remarked to Helma. (The two men were talking over plans for the dinner in Dubosc's studio after Helma's lesson.)

"And the ladies must balance the gentlemen," Gonsalvo went on, "and ten is a lucky number; one and zero is one" . . .

"Oh, these Spaniards!" put in Dubosc with a mock groan.

"Yes, ten *is* a lucky number," repeated Gonsalvo imperturbably. "And see how lucky it is for you, Maestro!" The Spaniard stepped over to Dubosc and spoke something low in his ear.

Helma could not hear what he said, but she saw the Frenchman's face lighten.

"Ah, *tant mieux!*" exclaimed Dubosc. "Now, there *will* be a treat for you, Helma!" he cried. "Our friend here is playing his trump card. For the tenth, or should I say the first?" he glanced with merry challenge at Gonsalvo, "our

friend has invited his great Bolivian mezzo, Concha Ximenez. These Spaniards all have a way of knowing one another, whether they come from Cadiz or Cochabamba. *Verdad*, Gonsalvo?"

The Spaniard seemed to be quietly amused at something.

"You'll think she's the Maestro's sweetheart, Miss Seymour, when you see them together," was his smiling comment.

"That's just the exuberant way of the Bolivian woman," retorted Dubosc. "A gifted artist, a real personality, a splendid voice," he added seriously, "or else she couldn't sing at all, with her method, or rather methods, and strong as a blooded bull for the bull ring!"

"As big, too," added the Spaniard slyly. "And you can see, Miss Seymour," he shot a side glance at Dubosc and dropped his voice to a cavernous undertone, "La Concha didn't study with our Maestro here." And the Spaniard laughed uproariously.

Helma had heard the Bolivian mezzo as Amneris in "Aïda" and had recognized the victorious magnetism of the woman's personality and fire, though Dubosc at her side kept calling her attention to technical slips . . . an undoubted *diva*, nevertheless. She was now all eagerness to meet the extraordinary Concha Ximenez.

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Dubosc's studio was the *rendez-vous* for the dinner. The Maestro had insisted on first offering the entire party a real French *apéritif*. So they all gathered at Dubosc's, all except Concha Ximenez. She, Gonsalvo announced, would come directly to the restaurant.

"In her coach and six," put in the Maestro with his sweetened malice.

Dubosc was giving his visitors a choice of two *apéritifs*. Each of the men accepted an absinthe, which, the Maestro explained for the benefit of the ladies, must be diluted with

water poured drop by drop through a lump of sugar held on a special strainer placed over the tall glass well filled with ice. Helma noticed the magic with which the water seemed to turn to milk. But there was also a "white" port, whose golden flood Dubosc referred to relishingly as "bottled sunlight."

"I take that myself. You gentlemen may take the absinthe. You have the inimitable good fortune of being younger." And his gesture seemed to recommend the more prudent way to the ladies.

But Miss Everell insisted on absinthe for hers, and in a gale of gaiety made each of the men help her in the delicate business of pouring in the water drop by drop.

"*Attention,* Miss Everell," said the Maestro once. "The throat is a very delicate affair, which you are using very indelicately just now," an admonition that the aspiring contralto answered by tearing out the "*E patria e trono, e trono e vita*" of Amneris at the very top of her lungs.

"Luckily you *can* sing better than that, Miss Everell," remarked Dubosc, when, breathless, the rash young woman came to a stop. "Of course Mr. Gonsalvo knows you can, and he and I will give our word for it to Mr. Saldini of Chicago."

The out-of-town manager, however, was in no critical mood.

"*Brava, Signorina,*" he cried, "*bravissima!*" And he clicked his glass of ice and absinthe against hers.

The two men from the opera bubbled jokes in Italian to each other and to the out-of-town manager. Suddenly the basso uttered three deep resounding notes as if in warning, and then pinching his voice into a little high bleat gave an imitation of a terrified tenor, which the conductor from the opera, the out-of-town manager, and Miss Everell seemed to find excruciatingly funny. Dubosc, amiable, but detached, was attending to the wants of his guests, and discovering wants where there had been none, as if for him this child-

ish horse-play did not exist at all. Gonsalvo stood a little apart, smiling, but he too was a non-participant. Helma noticed that he drank sparingly of the absinthe.

The two Brockways kept timidly to themselves. There was something definitely protective in the attitude of the older and plainer. Neither one made much progress with her glass of white port.

Helma went over to them. After all they were more her kind than this roistering Everell girl with her blatant beauty. ("Dolores indeed! What a misnomer!" Helma found herself thinking.)

"They're not a bit like us Americans, are they?" Helma said to the younger sister, for the sake of saying something.

"That's just what I was thinking," replied the country girl with a sort of startled eagerness. "You know it almost frightens me, and I don't dare drink more than a drop of this wine," she went on. "I hope Mr. Dubosc won't mind."

"No, he won't mind," said her sister promptly, even sternly. "But we must start along. I'll see if I can't help Maestro to get things moving." And with an ineffable touch of practical New England disapproval in her gait, she stepped off determinedly after Dubosc.

"You know," continued the younger Miss Brockway confidentially, "this is my first visit to New York. Sister has been just lovely to me, and so have all her friends" (Helma was wondering who these friends could be), "but really sometimes I'm frightened, the city is so huge and so strange, and there are so many people!" Then she seemed to have another cause for fright lest what she had uttered could sound disloyal to somebody. "Still," she amended hurriedly, "New York *is* wonderful."

As Helma considered this timorous, thin little woman, who certainly was young, but who seemed calculated for spinsterdom without a girlhood, she thought how different a thing New York was to herself. Strange, yes, but with a strangeness that was her motherland.

CHAPTER VII

Miss Brockway was successful in her little campaign with Dubosc. Presently they all piled into three carriages, and, with a good deal of merriment that was by no means *pianissimo*, they drove through the snowy streets—very rapidly, Helma thought—to the Italian restaurant far down on the East Side.

Two or three other diners were in the restaurant—Italians probably of the neighborhood. But they scarcely counted in the scene which met Helma's gaze. Before her stretched an oblong room, whose walls of pinkish drab would have looked bare and poor but for the "frescoes" of temples and waterfalls of southern Italy splashed over them with lavish hand by some ambitious house-painter, remembering in rude nostalgia the country of his childhood. A huge crystal chandelier, polished to the last hoop and spike, flooded the place with a brilliance of nocturnal noon. ("I can guess how somebody must have worked to shine up all those pendants," little Miss Brockway whispered to Helma.) All other details, however, were negligible beside the profuse display of a long table in the middle of the room, which seemed fairly to break beneath its burden of crockery and glass, of fruits piled high and wide in spreading dishes, of bulbous growths of green and white that looked to Helma's unaccustomed eyes now like onions, now like asparagus. Toward either end of this prodigious board deep red roses soared from stocky vases. And as a centre-piece there had been set up with a reckless disregard for latitude and season, a towering, if somewhat rusty, palm-tree, growing out of a clay flower-pot, which anxious hands had nearly, if not quite, concealed within a covering of crinkly green paper. There were lesser lights spaced along the walls, as there were other tables, smaller and round, but it was on the anniversary board in the middle that the whole room focussed.

An enormous *padrone*, who would have looked much more

comfortable in a chef's cap and apron than in the full evening regalia that he had assumed in honor of this festive occasion, stood by the door bowing in pompous state.

"Somebody told him he looks like Jean de Reszké," Gonsalvo in a discreet *sotto voce* confided to Helma. "That's why he's so *grandioso*."

A pair of little Italian waiters were scurrying, monkey-like, around the room, leaving no doubt that this dinner was a prime event in the prandial year.

As the mercurial twain were busily relieving the guests of their hats and wraps, the street door opened.

"Ah, look who's here! *Mirad quien está ahí!*" cried Gonsalvo, his voice leaping in a tight little gamut of ecstasy.

All eyes turned toward the door. A figure of imposing height and breadth, compassed in dark furs to the chin and higher, from under whose wide black hat a thick black veil hung almost to the mouth, advanced out of the night into the full glare of the room. The rouged vermilion of the lips, spreading into an obtuse angle, pierced the sable integument like a raw wound. No mistake, this must be Concha Ximenez!

The visitor threw back her veil, revealing the ivory of her slab-like cheeks, and looked around at them all from dark eyes large and lustrous like some friendly animal's. "But her nose is too big, and it's rather coarse in its tip-tilted bigness," Helma completed her mental comment.

A shout of greeting went up from the men, as with a single impulse they all rushed forward. But Concha Ximenez stopped them with arms stretched straight out before her, and then, as an expert peels bananas, she in a couple of long strokes peeled off her gloves. Immediately, one after the other, the men bent over her right hand and kissed it. There was a particularly ceremonial flourish to Dubosc as he performed the rite.

"I told you," Gonsalvo said to Helma, with the laugh of one who, having got his duty done, can afford to look with

tolerant humor on the duteous performances of others, "I told you you'd think she was the Maestro's sweetheart," and his eyes rested on hers in a steady gaze of confidential amusement, as if they had agreed to have a little secret together.

Dubosc was making the introductions. Helma heard the Bolivian woman's voice in response. It was full and low-pitched, and each word, uttered as if the singer loved and cherished it, touched her tangibly, like a hot caress. The woman was speaking to Miss Everell:

"So you have the bad luck to be a contralto. I'm a mezzo. Nobody has ever drawn the line. They try to. But it's like the philosopher's stone. Find it and you're something else. Usually a Wagnerian soprano. *Dubosc, écoute-moi, c'est vrai ce que je dis; n'est-ce pas?* But I shall never be that, and until you are, Miss Everell, just think of your fate! A handsome girl like you putting on forty years you've no right to just because you've got to sing some blind old hag! And when they let you be young and look yourself you're always an evil adventuress, like Dalila or Carmen, and the sympathy goes to the silly young thing that sings soprano, or the tenor who perspires so you want to die if you come within a yard of him.

"If I'm ever born again, may the Holy Mother make me a soprano, with no brains and a promising body!"

"But here, Doña Concha, is a soprano from whom the brains have not been left out, the star soprano of Maestro Dubosc." It was Gonsalvo that spoke, clicking again his little amused laugh.

The mezzo moved toward Helma with an engaging smile, which now gave her rouged lips, against the matt field of her large face, the look of a voluptuous crescent. She took Helma's hand in both of hers.

"Really, I meant no offence, my dear," she said, and her tones were doubly caressing. "I can see you're a girl of brains, and you have good looks too. So it's a combination, it seems, that sometimes *does* happen in a soprano. And if you have the voice to match, then you're the miracle, the

rara avis; the whole starry universe is yours, and the blessed saints may tremble! . . . Gonsalvo, stop your laughing. . . I'm only a Bolivian savage, you know, but you're a Castilian hidalgo.

"Did he say your name is Seymour, my dear?" the mezzo went on in an utterance which was the negation of savagery. "It's a charming name, and very distinguished, like yourself. And I feel sure you must have just the voice for it. But that, if you're the star soprano of Dubosc, goes without saying. There is only one Dubosc, and the Maestro's heaven admits the existence of only the brightest stars. So you are more than a *rara avis.* You are Dubosc's white blackbird, with a nightingale's voice tucked away in that snowy throat of yours."

"And she comes from Byzantium," Gonsalvo put in, with a stealthy snap of the eye in Helma's direction, "*Bizancio, país de las bellas y deliciosamente perversas damas.*" Helma caught the echo of Dubosc across the strangeness of Gonsalvo's idiom.

"Byzantium? How fascinatingly decadent!" exclaimed Doña Concha. "Ah, visions of mad Cyprian revels and lenient Circassian slaves! Oh, the white teeth of those women, my dear! Gonsalvo, were you ever in the Levant?"

"But it's Byzantium, Ohio," apologized Helma, a little ruefully.

At this sudden plunge to earth Gonsalvo and one of the opera men laughed loudly. Doña Concha turned on the mockers in theatric fury.

"You brutes," she blazed. Then to Helma, almost tenderly: "Don't mind them, my dear. Men are such stupid things. I don't know why they were ever created. I'm sure *you* are just as good as gold."

Already the mezzo's attention had fled on to other matters. Helma felt herself suddenly abandoned for an abrupt attack upon the provincial manager.

"How dare you tell me before I've had a morsel to eat

that opera is only an orgy, while your bloody concerts are the fields of the blessed! *Carissimo*, opera for me *is* an orgy, but it's a divine orgy! . . ."

"Hear, hear!" applauded Dubosc. "Listen all to the voice of wisdom! 'Tis the sage Athena that speaks. *Mes compliments les plus chaleureux, Madame!*"

"*Mil gracias, Dubosc!* You and I always agree."

"'A divine orgy!'" repeated the manager in measured syllables. "And that, isn't it a forgotten Titian which the gifted lady has recently discovered? Being Venetian myself I naturally ask the question."

"No, no, you naughty fellow!" The deep music of her laughter filled the room. "Neither painted orgies nor painted gold. . . After dinner I'll tell you my minimum concert-fee—but not where we can be overheard."

"This *is* the real prima donna," Helma was thinking, and she had a grotesque vision of the crowd that had gathered in its eager innocence on the station platform at Byzantium. But something in the woman's manner of forming her words crowded out that old picture. It was fine and chiselled, with a purity and ring to it for which the girl had no name ready. Unaccustomed she found it certainly, but not exactly foreign. She would ask Dubosc, or Gonsalvo. But there was no time now, for Gonsalvo was marshalling his guests to their places at table, amid the magnificent bows of the proprietor and the scurrying and scraping of the alert servants.

Gonsalvo took one end of the board, Dubosc the other. Helma was at first surprised, and even flattered, that Gonsalvo seated her at his own right hand. Then it occurred to her that the place of honor to-night was on the right hand of Dubosc and, quite properly, that had been allotted to Concha Ximenez. She was glad that Miss Everell's chair was opposite the Bolivian mezzo's. It was much pleasanter to have poor dazzled little Miss Brockway as her own *vis-à-vis*.

And then next to her was the elder Miss Brockway. This manner of seating ten people could not work out in a strict

alternation of sexes. But Helma didn't mind a bit the close proximity of the two Brockways, and she wondered whether there might not be method in the placing of the out-of-town manager on the right of Concha Ximenez.

There was no time for further considerations of that sort. Helma scarcely had unfolded her coarse, but scrupulously clean, napkin, when the proprietor himself approached the table bearing a large tray of cocktails. One by one, host and guests were served with a misted glass of the limpid appetizer. Gonsalvo seemed to scrutinize his closely, twirling it back and forth in his fingers two or three times. Then he rose ceremonially to his feet and proposed the health of his distinguished guest, the "*illustre Maestro Dubosc.*" But before he lifted his glass to drain it, impulsively he turned to Helma and touched it to her glass; for a flaming moment his eyes struck clean into hers.

"*Salud!*" he cried, now waving the tiny emptied goblet, bottom up.

"*Salud!*" Doña Concha chanted back at him from down the table, and Helma thought the curve of her half-lifted arm and the poise of her head quite marvellously graceful in so big a woman.

"Now, Gonsalvo, do sit down and let us eat; I know *I'm* positively famishing." There were sudden arresting accents in the Bolivian woman's cadenced speech.

Gonsalvo did as Doña Concha bade him.

The cocktail had given the last edge of irritation to appetites already keen, and the company now fell with a unanimous eagerness upon the *antipasti* that were circulating in its wake—the thin-shaved slices of *prosciutto*, the deep, mottled red of the *salami*, the fat sardines, and the queer onion-like bulbs in their shaded green and white, together with celery, olives, and *pâté-de-foie*.

"What do you do with this?" Helma asked of Gonsalvo, holding up one of the mystifying bulbs gingerly in the tips of her fingers.

"Eat it, of course," retorted the Spaniard with a guttural

relish. "See," and he sliced a bulb in three with his sharp knife, and by way of illustration was making one section gradually disappear into his upraised mouth.

The two opera men were laughing and jabbering to each other in Italian.

"You will find, Mademoiselle Helma," Dubosc cut in from his end of the table with a courteous authority, "that this delicious vegetable—no, should I call it a fruit?—has all the value of an absinthe with its cunning little treason left out. This is the *fenouille* of us French, the Italians call it *finocchi.* I am told the ancients esteemed it highly for its amatory properties. It was once administered to a Syrian girl who was held a captive in Alexandria. . .

"*Basta, Dubosc, basta,*" interrupted the Italian conductor, "you will alarm the ladies. Remember this is your birthday. Tell them instead the *leggenda della Venere frigia.*"

At that moment the basso twisted and turned as if he were having a fit and springing to his feet made the sign of the cross.

"Now, now," purred Gonsalvo, "*un po' di tranquillità!*"

"I don't know what this is all about," piped up the younger Miss Brockway, who until then had been as still as a mouse, "but this tough stuff that looks like celery tastes to me just like paregoric used to."

At that there was an explosion of laughter and questionings, and the previously silent little creature became quite red in her flustered explanations.

"Never mind, Miss Brockway," came the sensual voice of Concha Ximenez in soothing vastness. "Some vegetables have no sense of humor and people are like vegetables. *Finocchi* will never intoxicate anybody, and absinthe, if you take too much of it, gives you a horrible head. . ."

"Now, Doña Concha, don't preach us a temperance lecture. Don't tell us never to be a little intoxicated even on the Maestro's birthday!" Gonsalvo's eyes danced merrily as he called down the table to the Bolivian mezzo. Helma

caught the freemasonry of a friendly raillery that played between these two of a kindred blood.

"*Mon ami Gonsalvo, mon ami Gonsalvo!*" chanted the singer of the opera. "Love is the most marvellous intoxication, no bottle, no cork, no drawing, no disputing the absinthe flavor, just you! . . . Whoever *you* may be! But I told, you *Hidalgo de Castilla*, that I'm only a savage."

A question that Helma had been wanting to put all along now had its chance. Softly she said to Gonsalvo: "Where did she learn her English? It's wonderful."

"Of course," replied Gonsalvo behind the back of his hand. "She was born and educated in England. Don't you imagine she ever saw Bolivia. I don't think she's even been in Spain. Her father was Bolivian minister, or something, in London."

Helma now looked at Doña Concha with different eyes. There was no longer for her the exotic charm of the unexplored continent to the south, but a something of old-world culture and breeding sat in its place.

Just at that moment one of the bantam waiters came prancing up to the table, bearing aloft on his upraised hands a tremendous platter of steaming spaghetti. Little shrieks of delight and much guttural rapid-fire talk accompanied the dispensing of the slender, smoking snakes of paste. Meantime, the other waiter was filling a glass for each of the guests from the purple contents of a huge and bulging straw-encased bottle.

Before they attacked the spaghetti, Dubosc got up and, with a sweep of his arm that would have graced his assumption of a Valois noble, called on the company to drink to the health of the ladies.

"*Il segreto per esser felice,*" chanted the basso in an upper octave, imitating a contralto's caressing tones, till Concha Ximenez, bridling, raised a silencing finger. Then the dinner proceeded, not in all cases with the quietude of mouth proper to the best-bred circles of Byzantium, but with a relish unmistakable.

"Oh, you mustn't eat it that way," Gonsalvo gently admonished Helma, as she was cutting through the twisted strands of her pile of spaghetti with the side of her fork. "Look, Maestro, the *signorina* has never eaten Italian spaghetti before!"

Gonsalvo bent toward Helma's plate, took her fork, and adroitly rolled it in a neat twist of the paste, handing the fork back to her with a: "Now you see how it's done; just try it yourself. . . Here, take this big spoon. Hold it under the fork, spaghetti and all. There, that's it. . . Now twist. There's the girl! *Brava!* Look at her, Dubosc! Look, Saldini! She's handling it like a veteran! She'll be a better Italian yet than any of us! . . . My apologies to you, Maestro, and to you, Albanos," he addressed the men from the opera.

"No doubt her operatic studies are helping her to all the etiquette of the Italian table," Dubosc observed in his clear dry tones, as if saying something that only he of those present could fully understand.

"Well, I don't know," remarked Miss Everell, whom Helma heard thus enter the general conversational *mêlée* for the first time. "Really I prefer the good American way. . . It's cleaner." And she proceeded to demonstrate her independence by cutting her spaghetti with her knife.

"Suit yourself," said Gonsalvo, as if any spice there had been in the discussion was gone from it, and the Spaniard returned to the urgent business of his own spaghetti, while Helma toyed with hers. Somehow it was very pleasant to have the fostering attention of Gonsalvo at her side.

The glasses were emptied and refilled, and, under the watchful eyes of the waiters, hills of the swirling paste grew and dwindled and grew again. Helma seemed to herself as one surveying the scene from a musical mid-air of warmth and well-being.

"No, we've had enough of the *pasta*," she heard Gonsalvo saying. And her amazed eyes saw the pillaged platter yielding its place to not one, but three, varieties of chicken.

Always the chianti glowed in the replenished glasses, and along with the roast chicken a great salad bowl of crisp and bellying lettuce reached the table.

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"RIGHT here, before me," Dubosc directed. "Pardon me, Gonsalvo, if I intrude on the territory of my gracious host, but you know my weakness for making the salad dressing myself," and with noisy advice from the two opera Italians, Dubosc was soon immersed in the practical arcana of achieving a dressing for the lettuce that should touch his palate as savantly as the perfect tone of the perfect singer touched his tympana.

It was a wonderful salad, and after it the fruit and the cheese were wonderful, and the cups charged with the hot and savory *zabaione*. The chianti glasses had been swept away, and now another set were foaming with *Lacrymæ Christi*, "the yellow tears of the divinity," as the conductor from the opera put it.

"Yes, our most catholic friends," airily remarked Dubosc, "mock thus the agony of their expiring God. *Mais comme vin mousseux il est rudement bon!*"

And with a sudden *élan* he rose and toasted the prima donna of the present and the prima donna of the future. Through the rosy golden mist of the evening Miss Everell looked uncomfortable.

"I should like to know which of us you mean," she cried out in the richest contralto she could summon, and with a parade of gaiety that covered something which was by no means gay.

"Why, all three of you," retorted Dubosc with ready gallantry. "Stand up!"

And the little contretemps of Miss Everell was forgotten in the merriment of the rising trio. "Once more a thousand thanks, Monsieur Dubosc," said Concha Ximenez, "for admitting that I have a future as well as a past."

"And what a past!" breathed Gonsalvo.

But the crowning glory of the feast was still to come. And the proprietor, none other, brought it in.

The cake that he had prepared for the occasion was a mammoth affair of pale yellow surmounted by a small forest of gaily colored candles. With a regal gesture he set it down before Dubosc.

"*Zuppa inglese*—English soup! . . . I hope the candles are right, Maestro," he added, "just twenty-one."

"They will do," retorted Dubosc laconically.

A dead silence fell on the party. Solemnly Dubosc drew in an enormous breath. Then in one exhalation he tried to blow them all out.

"You nearly did it! Oh, gee!" shouted the younger Miss Brockway.

Her sister looked at her reprovingly.

In shorter puffs Dubosc finished off the two that had remained flickering. The *padrone* plucked deftly the smoking candles from the yellow mountain. Dubosc lifted the big knife from the side of the dish and proceeded to cut the slices.

"I wish some one would tell me," chirped little Miss Brockway, "why they should call that cake an English soup."

The party received this bit of naïveté with great merriment.

"Never mind, my dear," said Concha Ximenez again, "it's a manner of telling the English it isn't soup and it isn't English, but it's good. However, only a Latin or a savage like myself can quite grasp the full inwardness of that."

"A prima donna's idea of gratitude," was Dubosc's tart comment. "I believe, Madame Ximenez, the first great success of your eminently successful career was before a Covent Garden audience."

"Yes," said the lady addressed. "They liked my voice and nobody had the sense to bid me for heaven's sake go somewhere and learn how to sing . . . I had to find that out afterwards, for myself," she added quickly.

"Now do have another piece of cake," Dubosc rejoined in a tone that would have been tigerish if it had not been so bland. And temptingly he balanced a slice of the *zuppa inglese* on the broad knife.

"I know how good it is, *cher maître*," returned the Bolivian woman. "Spittle of the angels, you blessed old darling! But even if you were twice one and twenty, I wouldn't take it from you now! I have eaten enough."

"What a *marcato* you give those words, Doña Concha," spoke up the conductor.

The last bottle of *Lacrymæ Christi* had been drained. The Italian boys were placing cups of coffee before the diners. And now the proprietor himself approached again, carrying in his important manner a decanter filled with a clear green fluid.

"They call this liquor *strega*, a witch," Gonsalvo explained to Helma. "I suppose because when you've had a glass of it you're just like a witch!" and he gave her arm a knowing pat.

"No, *pardon*," objected Dubosc, "it's not quite so simple as that." But he did not confide his alternative theory.

"Weetch!" shouted the susceptible basso, "Weetch, did you say? Weetch!" and again, with many mysterious gyrations, he flung himself to his feet and, elaborately dipping the tip of one finger in his liqueur glass, he once more made the sign of the cross and then sat down as if appeased.

Cigarettes and cigars had appeared at the same time as the *zuppa inglese*, and the syrupy green liquor seemed perpetually to be replenishing the cordial glasses, which dotted the coarse white expanse of table cloth as with living emeralds. Helma began to feel more and more in every fibre a delicious sense of ease and comfort. Life seemed good, people seemed friendly, there under the radiant constellation of the big chandelier. Some inkling came to her, half articulately, of the early morning of the world before envy and curiosity and doubt had cast a poisonous shadow on the human family and wrapped about the innocent, inevitable

functions of the original pair the unfathomable mystery of the forbidden.

She now made no attempt to follow the jokes and tit-for-tats of her rollicking companions. She was present, but apart in her own dreams. It was enough for her that she was alive and that life that night was winsome. At her side Gonsalvo, glowing like a pictured god, was taking on more and more the powers of sorcery. His hair was black and sleek, a faint tinge of color had mounted to his ivory cheeks, his deep eyes glowed like dancing coals. Half the time he spoke in Spanish now, to Concha Ximenez, to herself, to others. She had little idea of what he was saying, cared nothing. In the purring sparkle of his syllables she divined the comfortable proximity of a big feline animal.

At the opposite end of the table, Dubosc, slim and elegant, arched his neck in courteous attention like a *grand seigneur* of the "great century" of his own country. Concha Ximenez seemed an *infanta* of her ancestral Spain. Even Miss Everell borrowed glory from the company. Helma fancied she saw in her a young Ortrud, an Ortrud whose heart had not all gone into pride, an Ortrud who had conquered Telramund for the sake of love. And she herself entered upon the stage, as the visionary Elsa. At the slightest cue she could have launched into the second-act duet from "Lohengrin." But how Dubosc would have disapproved! . . . Silence was best! . . .

It was all so warm, so golden, so vibrant, so good. Even the tobacco smoke seemed the inevitable incense, fragrance of myrrh and spices on the flaming altar of their lyric art . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Of a sudden Dubosc stood up. "Heavens, children! It's after twelve! Maybe not late for some folks, but tomorrow I've got to teach. I hate to be the one to break this up, *mes enfants*, I who by every rule of courtesy ought

to outlast you all! But it's got to be. Come, we must go!"

The others were rising. The proprietor and the two agile waiters had begun a search for hats and wraps. There was a last attention to drained liqueur glasses. A tumultuous interchange of compliments passed between Dubosc and Gonsalvo, on the one hand, and, on the other, the *padrone* and his portly wife, who, for the first time, but in all the tawdry glory of her massive trinkets and her most resplendent frock, had joined the party. Yes, the dinner had been very satisfactory.

Amid the jocund bustle Concha Ximenez singled out Helma and Miss Everell for a parting word. Her voice was low now and serious.

"I could burst into tears when I think of what you two girls still have to learn. It isn't the singing. I hear you have glorious voices both, and Dubosc I firmly believe is the best *professeur de chant* in the whole world. It's all the rest of it. The singer's life is the most selfish, the most self-centred there is. It can't be otherwise, or on to the rocks you go! You have to take your very soul and hack and whittle it into fuel sometimes to plough through the tide that runs against you. There's no pity for you, no quarter, and the worst of it is you can give none in return. Here to-night we're friends, but if you came into the opera company with me to-morrow I should have to hate you both. It isn't that one wants to. One loathes it, the worst of us. But it can't be helped. It's the struggle to keep our own heads above the water . . . Yes, Dubosc, in a minute. I just want to tell these girls one thing more . . .

"And as a reward get anything you can. I make no reservations. Diamonds, pearls, the left-hand *alliance* of a monarch. For it's the only tangible recompense there'll be for your singing. Think of me at the Bagby this morning. There I was pouring out the lilies and orchids of my soul, and marshalled before me only serge and shoe-leather! You open the holy of holies of your spirit, and what of it?

A certain very rich woman carried me off for luncheon afterwards in her carriage. 'Well, I am so glad,' she said, 'you didn't wear a tailored suit like Melba's last week!' That's the sort of person you unlock your very heart for! . . . Now be good girls, but don't scorn the left hand of any king, even a lumber king!"

This strange woman with her ready trick of words . . . What was behind it all! Helma looked at her searchingly. She resented her as an interloper . . . and her shoddy advice . . .

"But what makes you scowl so, my dear?" Most dulcetly the Bolivian mezzo spoke. To Helma her voice was as cloyingly offensive now as a draught of warm molasses—this vast, oversweet, steamy woman. "Oh, you'll find it quite endurable after all . . . I mean the singer's life."

Helma wanted to make some sort of reply, just to avoid appearing rude. But before she could think of anything to say they were all out on the sidewalk, and Concha Ximenez, wasting no time, had disappeared into her carriage, first inviting the out-of-town manager to accompany her.

Under the spur of the cold Helma turned instinctively toward Gonsalvo. The Bolivian mezzo had not spirited *him* away! As the keen air sent the blood dancing to her finger-tips, she exulted inwardly in his being there.

"Now that the coach-and-six has left us," exclaimed Dubosc, "we must plan to share our own modest vehicles."

"Let me see," Gonsalvo caught him up promptly; "I'll take Miss Seymour home for one. Then . . ." He paused to scan the others. Helma prayed he wouldn't ask Miss Everell. "Here, you two *furboni*," he cried to the Italians from the opera house, "you come along with us! We'll give you a lift uptown." The men nodded assent. "That will leave the Maestro with three young ladies to himself. *Beato Maestro!*"

The crisp air crackled with bantering adieux as Gonsalvo took his place beside Helma in the first carriage, opposite

his Italian guests. A last waved farewell to Dubosc's party, which was slower in getting started, and they were on their way through the wintry, semi-lighted streets.

The tireless Italians set up a stridulous burlesque of singing.

"Just listen to those fellows!" Gonsalvo mocked them. "Wouldn't you know they came from the opera house?" His hand sought Helma's and punctuated with little rhythmic squeezes a quickfire of Italian persiflage that he let fly at the opera men to their immense amusement. Though Helma caught scarcely a word of it, the pressure of his fingers gave her the assurance of a secret that left the others out. She and the man beside her were enthroned. This was no ordinary drive home. It had become a royal progress . . .

She was aroused from her dream of grandeur to find that the carriage had stopped and the men were piling out. Gonsalvo stood holding the door as the Italians bade them a playful goodnight. "*Addio, addio, speranza ed anima!*" Helma heard the basso's tenor mimicry. "*Buona se-e-e-e-ra,*" chanted the Maestro from the "The Barber of Seville."

"Do put your hats on or you'll catch your death!" Helma called out to them.

Gonsalvo said something to the driver and then climbed back, slamming the door to. Again they were off, leaving the Italian pair bowing and gesticulating by the curb.

"I'm afraid you'll catch cold yourself," Gonsalvo said softly, as he reached across and carefully tucked the fur-lined rug about her. Then he slipped his arm through hers and held it tight. She felt his warmth like that of a living furnace.

"You'll excuse me for taking you a little out of your way." He spoke in the low tone of an intimate deference. "But I didn't want those fellows to have to walk far on a night like this."

"We're nowhere near the opera house," she ventured at

random, having not the least idea, nor caring, what route they had followed.

"Oh, no; they live downtown. We're miles from the opera house . . . Great cards, those boys, aren't they?" he gave a little chuckle, "especially when they've had a drink or two . . . Well, anyhow, now you know what a real Eye-talian evening is like. I guess it's the first you ever spent, eh?"

She nodded.

"It's very congenial, very pleasant, once in a while," he continued. And then, "You don't mind stopping at my office a minute, do you? It won't take long. I just want to get my heavy ulster. It's getting colder and colder. I'm afraid it's going to hit zero. And after I leave you I have to take the L and change at the bridge, and then there's the long ride out to the other end of Brooklyn . . . You never saw my office, did you? That's funny! . . . It's only four blocks from where you live! You can come in and look at my picture gallery while I get my coat. I've got all the celebrities I've managed framed and on the walls there. Your picture will be there some day, right in the star row . . . I suppose that's the reward of a manager's life, the careers he makes and the pictures he collects. Well, we all ought to be satisfied if we can only do a little good while we are here and make some folks happier."

Helma breathed some sort of consent. The prospect seemed agreeable, though the details of his subdued harangue had passed her by with the light whirring of a swallow's wings. There close to Gonsalvo a sense of comfort and well-being again as at the dinner suffused her. She might have been floating in a halcyon bark upon a rainbow sea.

Once more the driver drew up his horse, this time half way down the block in a side-street. Gonsalvo opened the door and helped her out. While he stepped over to speak to the cabby, her eyes sought out his office. Before her she saw an old brick dwelling, and the big black-and-gold

sign which announced in gigantic letters that M. Gonsalvo managed lyric artists swore loudly in its spick-and-spanness at the faded brickwork and the denuded skeleton of a wistaria vine that draped itself mournfully over the chilly façade. The darkly curtained windows of the house seemed to absorb rather than to throw back the light from the street lamp . . . But Gonsalvo had taken her arm and was marching her up the stairs of the high stoop.

"You supposed I was in some big office building," he remarked in his leisurely way. "Well, I'm not, and I've got along very well here. I'm known; I don't need to advertise myself. And the rent here isn't so much. When you've got a big family that's pulling at every dollar you can take in, I can tell you the rent means something."

She was conscious that for the first time the non-committal, though far from taciturn, Spaniard was really confiding in her.

They were at the top of the steps and he was fumbling with the lock. Of a sudden it turned.

"I'll go in first," he said, stepping into the darkness and from somewhere switching on an electric light. She recognized the typical entrance hall of an old-fashioned New York residence, now diverted to business—bare walls and floors and dark varnished doors forbiddingly shut.

"I'm on the next floor," Gonsalvo resumed, and he continued to lead the way up the uncarpeted stairs.

Nearly opposite the head of the curving flight, he unlocked a door which again bore the managerial sign. This time he made way for her to enter first, immediately pressing a button which flooded the place with a glare that for an instant dazzled her.

"Now you see where Michael Gonsalvo conducts his musical business, and also you see the little art gallery that he has collected." Quietly shutting the door, he wheeled about with a gesture that struck Helma as truly Spanish of the books, and added: "Señorita Helma Seymour, I salute you and to the company of my stars I welcome you. Some

day you are going to outshine them all!" And, using just the tips of his fingers, he tapped her under the chin. "Look the pictures over," he went on, "while I get my ulster in the front room."

The "front room," she observed, was behind a partition of neatly-fitted varnished boards reaching from floor to ceiling. A second door, half of ground glass, and bearing, in big black letters, the word "Private," gave admittance to this room. Though the drawn shades at the bay-window shut out the lamplight from the street, and Gonsalvo had not switched on any light within, enough entered the room where she was standing to reveal vaguely a large desk against one wall, heavy hangings about the windows, and an arm-chair and a couch upholstered in leather, as well as a chair or two of lighter workmanship. Gonsalvo had disappeared into an invisible corner where she suspected hooks or a wardrobe.

The floor of the room where she was standing was all but covered by a dark dull rug of nondescript domestic make. There were a roll-top desk and a flat-top desk with their respective swivel-chairs, then three substantial wooden chairs set primly in a row, a bank of files, and along the entire wall opposite the hall a series of shelves, loosely littered with other files, magazines, and papers. These shelves reached up not more than three-and-a-half feet above the floor, and covering the space over them, and on across the wooden partition, and overflowing to the other walls streamed the gallery—the singers, the instrumentalists, the composers, the fellow-managers who, in the many years that Gonsalvo had served them, had lavished upon him these counterfeit presentments, inscribed in varied but bold chirographies—in ink now blue, now black, now white, and sometimes green or red—with testimonials of their esteem, respect, affection, all! With some of these effusive customers she had heard that Gonsalvo had quarreled a dozen times, but here was the visible signed witness to his usefulness.

She tiptoed forward and, resting her hands on the top of a shelf, observed at closer range. But she was not taking in much of what she saw. Again and again she passed in review the same five or six faces and read aloud the signatures without their registering; there even seemed to be a very flouncy photograph of Adelina Patti on which the diva's fingers had traced her exalted *"stima ed affezione."* But was it really Patti? The magic of the unaccustomed evening was still vibrant in all of Helma's being. She was breathing a rarer, more ethereal atmosphere. Suddenly she was aware that Gonsalvo was standing beside her. She looked around at him sharply. He had taken off his overcoat, but had not yet put on the ulster that they had come for.

His shoulder struck against hers.

"Come, *I'll* show you these before we go," he spoke with a velvety sibilance from between his teeth, and placing his big, soft hand flat between her shoulders he gently guided her from picture to picture.

She could hear the droning susurration of the names and the commentary as slowly they moved along the room, but the words meant nothing to her. The rustle of his Spanish voice reached her like an incantation. Her heart beat light and high, she wanted to gasp for air, she was rising into some upper electric region . . . They had paused before a picture . . . It was all she knew . . . The distant murmur of his speech had ceased . . . His lips were burrowing among the stray ringlets in her neck, sending streaks of goose-flesh down over her. His hand had moved forward and up and she was clasped against the maleness of his body.

She drew her breath in sharply; she started forward; words that she would summon strangled in her throat.

"Gonsalvo, what are you doing?" she managed to get out somehow.

For answer he turned her adroitly with his arms and, straining her to him, covered her protesting mouth with his.

His arms were crushing her, but with a frantic effort she wrenched herself from their hold and stood back a step, looking directly at the pale, tense, blazing Spanish face before her.

"We must go," she whispered hoarsely.

But he had seized her again, with a strength that was quieter, victoriously insistent, and he was kissing her mouth, her forehead, her cheeks, her ears, as he held her in the vise of his arms, and she could feel the hard agression of a knee striking wedge-like against her knees. Vainly she strove to twist her body, but she moved her head a little, and as her breath threatened to be choked out of her she sought with desperate fingers to pinch, to scratch, to pry him away.

The Spaniard loosened his grip, but still holding her encircled in his arms he pressed his face now suavely to hers. His lips were motionless against her lips: she felt herself enveloped in the male, tobacco-fragrant hotness of his breathing. Something that outdated her as the race itself smote her, as before her it smote her mother, her grandmother, her remotest ancestress; there was a sinking within her body as of a lift that drops in a shaft, her heart tore at her ribs, and she fell unresisting, swooning into the Spaniard's conquering warmth.

"Oh, Mike, don't, don't!" she barely breathed, as now with gentle precaution Gonsalvo half carried, half led her toward the unlighted "front room."

CHAPTER IX

It was a rapping at the door and the morning voice of Mrs. Wilkins that woke Helma into the ten o'clock blaze of winter sunlight which filled her room.

She shut her blinking eyes, clenched her fists, and waited.

"Good morning, girlie," said the familiar voice, "I've brought up your coffee. I'll put it down here on the table. You see I was afraid you'd miss your lesson. I didn't hear you come in last night. It must have been ve-ery late. I

guess Maestro's birthday party was a regular jollification."

Lesson . . . Maestro . . . Jollification . . . Each syllable struck on Helma's brain-pan with the hardness of flint and the sharpness of a surgeon's bistoury.

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Wilkins," she said with a hoarseness that she felt must somehow tell a tale. "But I don't think the Maestro really expects any of us to-day. I think he'll sort of take a day off himself. We were late at the party."

She was vaguely wondering if her words were carrying a conviction that could not be in herself, and she had a distinct recollection of Dubosc's saying that he *should* teach.

"I think," she added, with a deliberate effort at the right shade of deference due a landlady at once so solicitous and so undesired, "if you don't mind, I'll sleep a little longer."

"Why certainly, honey, if you don't feel like getting up, it's just what you ought to do," returned Mrs. Wilkins reassuringly. "Do you want I should put the tray with the coffee where you can reach it? Or do you think that will wake you up too much?"

"Never mind, thank you," said Helma, now very pleasantly. "I'll get up and drink my coffee and then go back to bed. It won't stop my taking another nap."

"All right, dearie, just as you please. Snooze away and have a nice rest." And the cheery woman bustled out, shutting the door carefully and tight behind her.

Helma neither got up for her coffee, nor did she go to sleep again. She lay flat, her hands gripped together under her head, recalling this and that as from a broken, tormented stream. Wisps and fragments of a memory, the cry of an offended nerve, the glimpse of a rumpled glove on the bureau brought back the night to her with the merciless, intermittent assault of a drill on rock. For a moment she would gasp and roll her eyes under the pressure. And then it all came back, with a definiteness of black on white that it had not had before. And she groaned from her innermost being. For what was this that she had done—the

thing that could never be undone? . . . She shut her eyes and ground her head on her clasped hands. Byzantium, dizzy, rocking as in an earthquake, seemed to balance itself and jeer at her. She despised Byzantium. She had well outgrown Byzantium before ever she stood on its "depot" platform to take the train for New York. But—she couldn't get away from it. It was there in mockery and scorn. Why scorn? And it called itself enlightened—a town with a college. And somewhere in the barrens of the corn the Rev. Howard Probbing, with his black felt hat and his collar buttoned in the back, seemed to her fevered brain to stand and dart at her anathema.

Opening her eyes, she tried to laugh. But the thing was stronger than she, and it all broke up, Byzantium and the corn-belt rector, into a wild and angular dance of scorn . . . She turned on her side and strove to think of nothing, to sleep. The dance went on, but more quietly, as if in shadows upon the drab curtain of her eyelids, and she herself was quieter. Then of a sudden a level plane—crimsoned, menacing—seemed to rise up like the arm of a gigantic mill-wheel and smite her consciousness . . . She had done the irreparable: thenceforth her life could never be what her life had been. She could walk abroad and talk to people, she could sing and outwardly she would appear as she had appeared before, but she should never be the same.

. . . The bland figure of her father, seated in his leathern chair, was looking up contemplatively from the book in his hands. His strong, gentle eyes were focussed on her. Was he telling her she was no more his daughter? Was he reminding her of poor Amy Gardner? . . .

She lay on her back and jammed her fists against her lips to staunch an outcry. She opened and again closed her eyes, only to see staring into them the blazing eyes of the Spaniard. Yes, he had been hovering there, behind the shadows, all the time. Now he had the daring to step out to the centre of her consciousness, and all her striving was powerless to banish him. His lips were parted in a laughter

she could not hear and the whiteness of his teeth dazzled her. She felt from his body an instant wave of male, tobacco-fragrant warmth.

As if to escape from it, she sat up. In an abrupt resentment, the long-trained self-direction of her life reasserted itself.

"This is sheer madness!" she said with a loud determination that sounded to her own ears almost ludicrous.

In spite of her aching body, she sprang out of bed, shut the windows, opened the register, and gulped down the waiting cup of coffee. She put on her dressing-gown and her slippers and went for her bath with a resolution that kept saying over to herself: "Don't be a little fool! Irreparable? What of it!"

And when she had finally bathed and dressed, and the memory of the past night was a little assuaged, she kept repeating to herself: "Nothing, nothing has really happened. Nothing, nothing, nothing!"

But the image of the Spaniard still stood before her, cruel as the land that gave him birth and kind as only man can be to woman.

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At luncheon time she went downstairs. Mrs. Wilkins had chosen on this occasion to regale her little household with popovers. In the eyes of the good woman there could be no doubt that popovers were an event.

"Made them myself!" she beamed, as the waitress set down within easy reach of the hostess a plate heaped with the fragile delicacies. "There they are, piping hot! Now, don't wait for them to get cold, or they'll fall. Help yourselves quick!"

Everybody put a hand out. Helma felt she had to join with the rest.

"Just like mother used to make, did I hear you saying, Mr. Tompkins?" went on the lady of the house. "You better believe your eyes! Real home popovers, I call 'em.

No boarding-house about these, thank you! They *are* the kind *my* mother used to make when I lived out in Byzantium. Taste just that way, don't they? Now, Helma; you're letting yours get all cold; then it'll be soggy." There was real disappointment in Mrs. Wilkins's tone. "Here's Annie with another plate; you *must* have a hot one, Helma. No? And you don't seem to like those good cream potatoes, either. Well, never mind, honey! Too much party last night, *I* guess. But, then, Maestro don't have but one birthday every year."

And the garrulous woman was presently rattling on about some other urgent subject, the popovers and Byzantium and Maestro's annual birthday party left behind in a new flight of fancy.

The popover was like India rubber in Helma's throat, but she managed to choke down a little of it with the aid of tea, and then she excused herself and climbed back to her room.

But here there was nothing to do. The routine of study was broken. There was now no lesson with Dubosc, nor was it the day for the French lesson. She could not dream of practising. She picked up her French exercise book and tried to translate a sentence: "Mary is sleeping now; it is better to leave her in quiet. But the doctor told us to give her the medicine at nine o'clock."

She shut the book and put it back on the table. Her face was burning, but somehow the room seemed chilly for all of the oppressive sunlight that flooded it.

She got a shawl to cover herself and lay down on the bed. She shut her eyes. But she still saw. She saw Gonsalvo, his vigorous shoulders, his face white and drawn, his eyes afire.

Abruptly she reached for her watch. No, he would hardly be back from his luncheon yet . . . Why should she wonder? . . . She tucked her watch under the pillow, drew the shawl over her again, and wished for sleep. But her brain was in a buzz, her hands felt clammy as she knitted

her fingers under the shawl, the whole room seemed to vibrate about her in tiny tremors that suggested the burr of an army of gnats . . . Gonsalvo . . . This present, whatever it might be, was intolerable. Everything went down before the single overmastering thought, she must see Gonsalvo. *Why* must she? She could not say. It was no impulse, but a necessity. Like a child in terror at being left alone she *must* go to Gonsalvo as the refuge from the emptiness of this room, now drained of study, art, the very purposes in which she hitherto had recognized herself for what she was.

Half an hour later, dressed for the street with a jealous thoroughness and care, Helma paused at the bureau and scrutinized her appearance in the glass. Unlike the old mirror at Byzantium, the glass gave back to her only half her figure. But what she saw, she was able to approve. There was no denying it—why should she attempt to?—it was a splendid image of fair-haired girlhood, and the dark walking-suit became her well. Her hat, her gloves . . . There was nothing to change . . . But—girlhood? . . . The word unspoken seemed to die in her throat.

Once in the street, she walked briskly, even with assurance, toward the nearby office of the musical manager.

As she reached the house, with its high, old-fashioned stoop, and the protesting spickness of the black-and-gold sign, she had an impulse to turn back, but, repressing it, walked straight on and mounted the steps. On the landing before Gonsalvo's door she stopped a moment for breath, then opened the door and entered the office.

A Jewish girl in spectacles, little and alert, looked up from her typewriter. On one of the three prim chairs was seated a dark fellow, hardly spruce or fatuous enough for a minor opera singer, but probably something in the musical breed.

"What can I do for you?" asked the girl promptly.

"May I see Mr. Gonsalvo?" replied Helma. Her heart was threatening revolt, and she spoke in the deliberately soft

and breathy voice of one who must seem at all costs controlled.

"He's busy just now. Can you wait a few minutes?" returned the typist.

Then he was there!

"Certainly," answered Helma, with a relief that she strove not to make too manifest in her tones.

"Just sit down in one of those chairs; I don't think he'll be very long now," said the girl, and she returned to her typing.

Helma sat down one chair removed from the nondescript foreigner. She held her hands firmly together, but her eyes travelled over the desks and littered shelves and such of the gallery as came within her range of vision; they wavered at the ground-glass door in the wooden partition at her left. Then they looked at it squarely. Then they looked away.

Of a sudden that door opened. Her heart jumped. The muscles of her neck were tremblingly taut. She stared before her. Across the range of her vision passed a man in a long dark overcoat. He was putting on a derby hat. He opened the door into the hall and went out, closing it after him. But she was aware of another presence.

Gonsalvo with cat-like tread had stepped before her . . . Her neck unclamped. She was gazing upward, her mouth, she knew, ridiculously open, but she had to have breath. Gonsalvo looked Spanish, fresh, and smiling; scrupulously well-groomed.

"How do you do, Miss Seymour?" he said in free, pleasant tones. "I'll see you in a few minutes. You don't mind waiting, do you?"

"Of course not," she articulated, in a way she knew to be a feeble compromise between a gasp and a stammer. The blood was mantling through her head. She felt unspeakably foolish and ashamed.

"All right, then, I won't be long," he returned affably. Then he spoke in Italian to the dark fellow, asking him into the front room. The other got up and followed Gonsalvo,

with a professional grin which disclosed imperfect and discolored teeth.

"How sickening!" Helma thought.

The door into the front room was now shut, and she was alone except for the little typist, who seemed to be applying herself with relentless industry to her letters. Helma's eyes no longer travelled around the room. Her spirit seemed to have congealed. She was breathing quietly, but a little sharp and fast. She was like a suspended substance, in the immemorial attitude of waiting.

Despite Gonsalvo's assurance, her waiting seemed the proverbial age. The typist clicked and clicked at her machine, from time to time consulting her note-book. At length the door marked "private" opened. Helma continued to stare stonily before her, but she could hear the rapid-fire of voices in a foreign tongue. Then she half turned her head and turned it back again. She had caught a glimpse of the two men standing in the doorway still talking. At last, as the stranger, hat in hand, crossed her vision toward the door into the hall, she heard the voice of Gonsalvo from the front room: "Come in, please, Miss Seymour."

She rose with a mute obedience and went toward him. Gonsalvo took her hand in his great, smooth hand and pressed her into an armchair. He closed the door into the outer office and sat down in the swivel-chair before the desk, swinging round to face her. The winter sunlight was still slanting into the bay window over the street, just as it had pursued her since her awakening in her own room.

She raised her eyes to the Spaniard. He appeared genially non-committal, resting his hands on the slim wooden arms of his chair. He might be on the point of rising to introduce the Australian Nightingale or to hand Madame Patti a million-dollar contract. He looked well of body and spirit, and prosperous. Her eyes told her nothing more . . . She felt a flutter of her pulse, her hands sank into her lap; she looked away.

"Well," said Gonsalvo softly, "I suppose you didn't go to Dubosc for your lesson to-day."

"No," she answered with effort, almost inaudibly.

They both sat silent, she with her eyes cast down.

All at once he remarked in his equable, matter-of-fact way: "This sunlight's been bothering me all afternoon. There's too much of it for midwinter."

And he got up and pulled at the hangings which had been drawn back from the bay, so diminishing the flood of light and the visibility from without.

A mighty impulse of flight surged within her, steeling her to action. She sprang to her feet and turned toward the ground-glass door. Gonsalvo was there before her.

He laid strong resisting hands on her shoulders.

"Why, Helma, what's the matter?" he half whispered, his voice aping to her ears the innocent wonder of an astonished child.

"Let me out!" she gasped beneath a convulsive breath.

The Spaniard said nothing, but obediently lowered his hands.

She swayed like a mast that is loose in its socket. And with the sensation of sinking, she leaned against Gonsalvo. His arms were about her in the enveloping embrace of a warm rock . . . She was weak, too weak to stand . . . Suddenly she found the strength of an amazing inspiration. She grasped the back of his head, high, above the ears, and drew his face to hers. With her teeth she bit into his lips, as into a fruit. She drew his blood.

He tore himself free of her.

"*Rabiosa! Tigre!*" he hissed very softly. Then, still holding her shoulders tightly grasped, he said in a quick, distinct undertone, "Sit down in that chair; I'll send the girl out on an errand," and half-opening the ground-glass door he stepped into the main office.

CHAPTER X

That day began for Helma a new life. She recognized it as new, though there were moments when in the forgetfulness bred of ingrained habits she thought of herself as the old Helma. But with a start she would remember that that past was forever and irreparably behind her. Then there would be a moment of revolt. Why should the division exist, why a change, why irreparable? Was she more than fulfilling a natural destiny, an inalienable right? Byzantium . . . There was nothing more to be said. The whole answer, imperfect though it might be, lay in that word.

Fiercely she reasoned with herself. Was she not justified, despite the everlasting creeds, isms, and Byzantiums, in doing with her own body as she chose? Nothing in her would say "No," but something still would tell her that all her tortured dialectics could not eliminate Byzantium. Byzantium might be illogical, ridiculous, evil, as she now believed it. But Byzantium was *there*, vigilant behind the frowning bastion of its conventions.

Resolutely she would turn her face from it all. And then she had joy of her own life, of her secret life, of that which was hers and hers alone, like some precious templed emblem, something that no profane eye should discover.

Gonsalvo was in all ways the most discreet of lovers. He told her with quaint, Latin literalness that with him she was quite "safe." She believed him. There was no outward appearance of an evil; why should there be, when inwardly she indignantly denied its existence? She lunched with him oftener than of old, occasionally she dined with him. Their other meetings were cautious and unobserved. Yes, Gonsalvo was the perfectly-conducted lover.

Lover? . . . That word, too, when it rose in her consciousness, took her at undefended moments and brought Byzantium smashing back.

"And that makes me his mistress!" she reflected bitterly. She could not find herself extracting glory from the circum-

stance, like an Emma Bovary. She might pose before her glass as Semiramis, the Borgia (not yet whitewashed of her proverbial iniquities), Isolde, Kundry, all the sinning sisterhood of opera, but in her life she never ranged herself with Gabrielle d'Estrées, the Montespan, the Pompadour, Agnes of Issoudun, and Jane Shore, names that even Byzantine repudiation had failed to erase from histories and encyclopædias; she had not that pompous snobbery of sin . . . It might be sin, it might not be sin; she *knew* it was not, yet she was unwilling to decide. She lived. That was enough. She scarcely dared to tell herself she loved Gonsalvo. At moments she even questioned whether such *could* be the fabled miracle of love. And still, without love, her relation to him would be unthinkable . . . Yet *would* it? Hadn't she a right . . . or *was* it a right and not a desire? . . .

What she preferred was to dwell on nothing speculative and, consequently, troublous. In these weeks she had Gonsalvo and her career. To both she clung with a ravening selfishness. They sufficed. It was not her part to look at them in the light of eternity. God had given them, she dared tell herself. What god? The god of Winfield Gaines? . . .

She was developing like some magnificent prize animal. Dubosc used almost those very words to her. And in the dingy mirror at Mrs. Wilkins's she could see herself flourish and expand in the opulence of a splendid, health-irradiating womanhood. Helma the girl was dead. But what a woman! . . . She hung her head abashed at the impudence of harboring such a thought—some Byzantine instructions, those against vanity and vainglory amongst them, still stood by her not seriously questioned. If fair she was, that gift she should accept meekly . . . And her young, strong womanhood waxed to her own gaze like an unfurling of light.

In her concentration on her two all-absorbing interests, her work and Gonsalvo, she found in these generous days, with

their plenteous life and their allegro briskness, that she had no need to think too much of other matters. Sundays she still sat with Mrs. Wilkins in the dimness of the church and could repeat as the identical words of her own living the petition against wandering thoughts . . . The sweeping fire of the career was on her in all its impetus and force.

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These days she devoured the teachings of Dubosc with a consuming eagerness that threatened to overtax even his supply. A strange, proud smile played often on the clean-carved features of the master. He, too, was spurred to his best pace to give his "star" pupil all that her wolfish hunger for the "great singing," his "great singing," could digest. And her happiness with Gonsalvo, which she felt in every atom, nerve, and sinew, was the crucial factor in her assimilation of Dubosc's learning. And as the body blossomed in its glowing young perfection, so grew the voice in power and beauty. Nor ever yet had the grey spectre of the future stepped from the charnel house of unending pasts to chill with its shadow the ardent radiance of her scene.

She had found Gonsalvo invariably considerate. Story-book notions of Spanish cruelty or Latin treachery that she might have entertained at the beginning of their acquaintance he dispelled daily. It was a pleasure to her just to be with him. Sometimes he alluded to her coming career and to his management of her, quite as a matter of course. Once he took her to a play. But on that occasion, in his casual Latin way, covered with the affable smile of worldly wisdom and indulgence that she had come to recognize as part of his accoutrement, he was at pains to clear up a point of possible doubt. "This won't happen often," he said. "We can be the best of friends, but there must be no scandal. My wife would divorce me."

He seldom spoke of personal matters. Yet once in a while, when he felt a little expansive (especially over a

bottle of tarragona or of chianti), he modified enough the caution that never forsook him altogether to say something of the family far out in Brooklyn. And from these rare semi-confidences Helma learned the, to her, curious animal closeness of Latin fathers to their offspring. Gonsalvo's life in New York was singularly separate from that of his family, yet he was evidently bound up in his six children, in their studies, in their growth, in the possibilities of their future. The wife in all this seemed to be hardly more than the agency of breeding and nourishment, a household necessity, like the loaf of bread and the flagon of water. Romance he had found elsewhere. All this she acknowledged not without a touch of dismay. The family tie of these Latins had a surprising depth, and strength, and toughness. But the Spaniard loved *her* too. Why shouldn't that love be just as strong? He needed her quite as much as the shut-in Italian wife, the drudge of his kitchen and nursery. . . Then, out of the tortured rambling of her speculations, the thought of Gonsalvo would possess her body and soul. Mike was enough . . .

She found herself taking an odd interest in those unseen Gonsalvo children. Why couldn't he bring over a couple of the younger ones to a matinée with her, or for a picnic in some quiet restaurant? In a very guarded fashion she once led the talk in that direction, but either Gonsalvo was really dull to her meaning or he preferred not to understand. Why? It was a generous impulse on her part . . . One day a fanciful contraption in the window of a toy-shop caught her eye and she went in and bought it. Later she gave it to Gonsalvo with the injunction that he take it to one of the children. At the time he thanked her with a profuseness and deprecation that failed to conceal his embarrassment, and she never heard a word of it again . . . In a luxurious moment she even wondered how it would seem to have a child herself by Gonsalvo. Straightway mocking voices within her laughed this folly to the uttermost limits of scorn . . . She gave up the thought of seeing the chil-

dren, but that distant house in Brooklyn was often in her mind. He once told her that it was large and of brick—"Almost a mansion," he said. Then he added that he needed such a house because of the size of his family. "And who knows?" (His relishing words stabbed her like a rapier.) "That family may be getting larger still!"

CHAPTER XI

During these weeks the settled expression of happiness in Dubosc's face could not but cause remark. "Do you see how Maestro keeps smiling all the time?" Gonsalvo observed to Helma. "He knows that at last he's found his singer!"

One day the Spaniard ventured to rally him on his joyful looks. "Now I know," Dubosc retorted, "why you come snooping around while I'm giving my lessons, you old fox! You want to nose out my secret, don't you? Well, I'll not tell it. Time has my permission to when Time gets good and ready. That's enough!"

With his favored pupil, however, he was less reticent. True, in the presence of the sphinxlike accompanist he was the strictly objective pedagogue. Only the labor, sober, unremitting, existed for him at these times. He and Helma might have been chiselling at a block of marble or working out a problem in descriptive geometry.

But there were other hours together—two or three of them a week—when neither the accompanist nor anybody else was present. It was then that Dubosc taught her the rudiments of acting and *mise-en-scène*, and it was then too that he unloosed his own enthusiasms, that his mania for the "great singing" sprang forth like a boiling geyser, that he uncovered to his pupil the ardor and immensity of his faith, and by precept and example instilled it into her ready mind and heart. And these were likewise the times when he talked to her of herself.

Though he cautioned her against the perils of both the

shouted boast and the whispered confidence, he did not hesitate to speak in utter frankness into her delighted and astonished ears exactly what he thought of her and of her future.

"I'm not a teacher of acting and don't pose as one," he would tell her, "but just the rudiments, and just the way to proceed in a few parts my little Helma must know before she presents herself for the stage. The voice you have, and I teach you to use it. You'll sing. You'll sing with the 'great singing,' with the abiding traditions. That'll be enough for the beginning. Then somebody else who cares for acting as I do for singing—maybe it'll be the *régisseur* at your first opera house—will take you in hand and put you through all the dramatic paces. It's enough for my purpose if you know the first principles of the stage . . . And it shall be soon," he would add in a vague prophecy.

Helma was curious enough to wish to pin him down to a more definite statement. But it was evident that Dubosc was maturing something in his mind, some project for her future that he was not yet ready to divulge. However, he would say:

"It won't be long now. Your voice is a voice of power, and your body is as vigorous as a healthy pony's. I had no idea that I could get along with you so rapidly. But you drop years out of the accepted curriculum. That Spinti fellow knew his business. It was all solid work, right from the first brick, that he did for you. I haven't found one thing to be undone, nor very much to add either, except the polish and the rôles, and then that sense of the 'great singing.'" Here his voice would die away as in the ecstasy of some inner and finer hearing vouchsafed to him alone.

"And then there's your gift, your extraordinary gift!" Gallically he would draw out the adjective. "Of course you'll continue to develop and to learn after you leave me. But that will be through experience and singing right."

Again he would assure her that her stage time was near at hand. "Your voice has the strength and the resistance

of a real *falcon*. No reason why you can't do now Aïda and Valentine, as well as Leonora and Desdemona, provided you never, never force your middle tones. Of course I'd be cautious about Wagner. Nothing beyond Elisabeth or Elsa for several years to come."

He admitted that a singer who knew how to sing could sing Wagner without damaging the voice, but he had something of the prejudice of his own singing-time against the Wagner operas. At least no woman under thirty, and with the soundest schooling behind her, could venture with impunity on Isolde and the Brünnhildes. He advised her for the nonce against German Lieder, as lying too often in in the middle voice, and certain French and Italian rôles, especially La Gioconda, he put for the present on the forbidden list.

"Besides," he would say, "at first no part requiring dramatic violence. In Valentine, Aïda, Leonora, the acting must be measured, stately. None of these raving Santuzzas or Toscas with their *manie de tout casser* until you are absolutely sure of your whole equipment, the stage as well as your voice. At the beginning they might upset your whole vocal control. And Carmen—no, I never can see my little Helma as that gypsy baggage. For my little Helma isn't little. She's a real *grande dame* of opera. And may she never grow fat!"

The good man, as she later realized, had scarcely attended to so much as the names of Debussy and Richard Strauss, nor had he guessed the first minor second of all that was in store to trouble his golden dream of a *bel canto* worshipped and retained. But he flamed into eloquence when, poring over with her the scores of "Don Giovanni," of "Norma," of "Semiramide," of "Lucrezia Borgia," he told of Pasta, Grisi, Lind, Viardot, Tietjens, with the last of whom he had sung himself. That was the glory and the dream! And during those talks, always with pen in hand to inscribe the golden legend of his commentary amongst the staves

and on the margins, he went through the scores with a searching care that slighted never a note nor an accent.

"Some of these operas, Helma, you may not have the chance to sing," he would admonish wistfully. "But if you should, you must sing them as the great singers sang them."

And, measure by measure, in these unforgettable days, he would expound and perorate on the dramatic "slow coloratura" of Rossini and Bellini, on taste in ornaments, on the true use of the portamento, on the ideal grace of the round Italian phrasing. Helma came insensibly to feel that Dubosc was not just the thorough and infinitely careful teacher; she felt him rather as a deity and herself the ardent neophyte who should one day be the prophet.

CHAPTER XII

THAT great day, she gathered from Dubosc's spoken calculations, was not to be postponed much longer. More than once in January and February he had said: "Your voice and singing have now almost reached the point where the actual discipline of the stage is the next step." So long as he remained vague as to the when and how, the immediacy of that step did not impinge on her. It was a lovely, rainbow-tinted prospect for the near, but indefinite, future. Perhaps that was as much as she wanted. Without quite admitting it to herself, she shrank from any altering of the happy course of these winter weeks. Still, one afternoon, late in February, Dubosc became more explicit.

It was a private dramatic lesson. He had been training her in the prison scene of "Il Trovatore." Doing the Manrico himself for the moment, he was teaching her the half-swoon into his arms at the words "*Prima che d'altri vivere io volli tua morir.*" He had been as impersonal about it as if they were both machines, when suddenly he did an unprecedented thing for him; he showed temper.

"Well, Miss Helma Seymour," he spurted, "if only the

gods had been as kind to your arms and legs and body as they were to your larynx! You're a very handsome young woman. You've got the face and the figure and the hair too for the parts you want to sing, but you're like all the rest of the American girls. You've not got a spark of real stage instinct in all your fine, strong body. When it comes to acting, some little misshapen idiot from the cliff houses of Naples may pare off more dramatic talent from her little-finger nail than you *Américaines* could gather up if you lived a thousand years."

Obviously Dubosc saw written on Helma's face the dismay that his words shot through her. Not that she felt that her ego had become so inflated—hadn't she always been humble before art? But—this from Dubosc!

"Forgive me, Helma," he exclaimed immediately afterwards. "We've done enough for to-day—perhaps a little too much. I didn't mean all that. Really I didn't. We won't work any more this afternoon. We'll have a quiet cup of tea together. I've got something important to say to you. This is as good a time as another. Just sit there while I get the tea things."

Helma sat down in an armchair and watched Dubosc as he assembled his tea things and lighted the lamp under the kettle of tarnished brass. It was as if somebody had suddenly slit the sails of the gallant bark that she had been riding in triumphantly all these months. But she waited, waited for Dubosc.

At last the kettle was singing and Dubosc addressed himself to brewing the tea.

"Now," he said, "as he handed her a steaming cup. "That'll make you feel better. The fact is, we were both too tired."

He tasted of his own cup, and then continued with deliberation:

"Forgive what I said just now, Helma. Once in a while we French are a little hasty. It's quite true that your dramatic gift doesn't equal your voice. *Ma foi,* you'd be the

eighth wonder of the world if it did! But you're far from clumsy physically. You'll make a better actress yet than nine out of ten of the American girls that go into opera. You'll have to work for it, though, and, as I've told you before, you must avoid the parts that are not your parts. I saw your Nordica when she tried Carmen. You've a much more plastic body than hers; but promise your old Dubosc you'll leave Carmen and all that tribe forever alone."

Helma was feeling distinctly better now. After all, she had never deceived herself about her talent for volcanic drama; the women of her mirrors had been princesses and other stately dames.

"What I really should have said," resumed Dubosc, "is this, that the time for your stage drill is almost here. It is essential that you have that training to bring out the full value of your voice. You can't get it at the Metropolitan Opera House, and I don't believe in your spending the 'prentice months in any of the great opera houses of Europe. You need the hard bedrock experience of a provincial theatre.

"Now this fellow Gonsalvo has been talking to me about some sort of Mexican or South American project that he has in mind. I gather that he'd like to take a travelling company down there, with you and perhaps Miss Everell. So far he hasn't laid any definite plan before me, but I'm familiar with his methods and I'm sure there's something like that up his sleeve." (Helma was now all attention.) "This knocking around from pillar to post in Spanish America," Dubosc put down his cup and turned toward her with an expressive shrug, "that's not my idea at all. You'd get no proper training, you'd tire yourself out, you'd run the risk of spoiling your voice, and, besides, it might cost you every cent you possess. . . By the way, Helma, I'm not going to inquire into your finances too closely, but do you think you would be able to get along for a few months in Europe? I should really like to see to launching you myself in my own France, where I know my way and where I could make the

necessary arrangements . . . the necessary arrangements," he repeated softly, almost as if he had forgotten that Helma was there.

"Why, yes, my money is holding out very well," Helma replied, with a tinge of inquiry in her own tone, for really she had not been thinking much about money of late. Naturally she was now curious as to just what Dubosc was driving at.

"Those Spanish-American ventures," he said, shaking his head almost sadly, "I do not like them! Sometimes somebody makes money, but never the singers, unless one of them happens to be a Patti and refuses to step upon the stage until her own big *cachet* in gold is in her pocket-book or her bank. At any rate, it's never a débutante like you. They might offer you as much as five hundred American dollars a performance, but after they'd reneged on your salary for a couple of weeks you'd probably find yourself stalled on the top of the Andes or in the swamps of the Orinoco, with your own way to pay back to New York, unless you desired to linger among the vultures or the mosquitoes. . .

"No, that won't do at all," he added emphatically. "If you have the money to live along as you're living now for another year, I can find a way to take you personally to Europe and to get you started in the right fashion over there. And you won't be obliged to finance any mushroom opera company to have your début, either. You're already too big a person for that."

Dubosc pushed his empty tea-cup aside and lighted a cigarette. Helma said nothing. She was thinking too. She could guess that anything like an intimacy between Dubosc and Gonsalvo was an impossibility, but it had never occurred to her that they might not be on the very best of terms in a business way. Did not Gonsalvo invariably bring any promising voice he heard to Dubosc, even if Dubosc made it a rule to accept only those that he deemed worthy of his august attention? Now she detected for the first time a rift in what had seemed on the surface an entirely amicable

business acquaintance, and with it the subtle and rancid wind of suspicion blew counter to the strong and tranquil current of her life. However, she answered Dubosc.

"I certainly have money enough for such a plan," she said with an air of decision, "provided there is no paying out of big sums for a début."

"I can assure you you won't have to pay a penny," Dubosc cut in almost testily. "That is, not if you go to Europe with me. But if you should embark on some wild-goose chase to Spanish America," again he shrugged his shoulders, "well, I won't discuss that any further."

He took a fresh cigarette and struck a match emphatically.

Then he went on in his usual measured way.

"I should want to finish up this year's teaching here. We could go to Paris in May, for instance. I haven't been to Paris in several years, but I still have plenty of *relations* there. I might even take a studio and start a class. Some of my Americans will want to study with me wherever I go. I might conceivably quit New York for a whole year. But believe me, not forever! Dubosc can get along very well without American ice-water, but he's a strong partisan of a good furnace fire in winter and of his own private, personal bath."

He paused again before resuming with grave deliberation:

"You would polish your French on the spot, and then I would inquire among the impresarios and find out just where there was going to be an opera season suitable for your début. Not at Toulouse or Marseilles or Bordeaux—those southern audiences are merciless toward singers—but at Lille, perhaps, or Nantes or Rouen or even Angoulême. As to the cost, my little Helma, I can promise you it would be the other way around; from the first *you'd* be getting at least something. Your old Dubosc doesn't want a contract now. When you are on your feet and the stream of gold is coming in, then it will be time enough to think of him. He doesn't

always know whom he can't trust, but he *can* trust his little Helma with his very soul!"

✦ ✦ ✦

With mingled emotions Helma went out into the wintry twilight on her way back to Mrs. Wilkins's. The elation that she would naturally feel at Dubosc's finding her so near the first big milestone of her long road was tempered by his allusions to Gonsalvo. He had appeared to assume that as a matter of course the Spaniard was sly and tricky, and he had clearly indicated that they were by no means hand and glove in business. She had recalled that somebody or other had spoken as if Gonsalvo took his commission from pupils that he sent to Dubosc, and she had laughingly reflected at the time that he would never get rich from the commission on her. Then she had not thought of the matter again until now, when it seemed to assume an intrusive and ugly importance. . . All the flattering things that had been poured into her ears these last months, above all by Dubosc and by Gonsalvo, had induced her to look on herself as something apart. Even the "sin" of which theologically she had been guilty had come to seem to her quite innocent because it concerned her and not another. It was as if the world and its soil could not touch *her*. She could conceive of Gonsalvo, the sharp Spanish merchant in musical wares, as sly and tricky with someone else, but it had not occurred to her that he could be anything but honest and devoted in his dealings with Helma Seymour. Had he not told her himself that the affairs of a musical manager were never less than a gamble? On whose success could he gamble now better than on hers?

Thus she sought to answer her alarm as she rode downtown in the trolley-car. But her suspicions would not subside entirely. They even obtruded on her sleep, indefinite, troublesome. . .

CHAPTER XIII

The following day Helma was to lunch with Gonsalvo. It was their first luncheon together in a week, and for the only time he had asked her to meet him not at the Spanish boarding-house, but at the Italian restaurant which had been the scene of Dubosc's birthday party. In her ill-defined anxiety, desirous and yet fearful of bringing matters to an issue—but to what issue?—Helma hurried through the March wind without feeling its cold and got to the restaurant a good twenty minutes before her host. The place looked deserted and mussy. Evening must be their great time here, she thought. The palms seemed made of dingy paper, the frescoes showed soil. She could see the *padrone* and his wife, with a brood of youngsters, scattered around a big table in the farthest corner in family-like *négligé*, enjoying what appeared to be a Gargantuan repast. Helma sat down at a table near the door. To the *cameriere* who came running up for her order she merely said that she was expecting a gentleman. The fellow bowed and trotted away.

Eventually Gonsalvo arrived. He apologized briefly for being late, called out an Italian greeting to the family, and, seating himself as if with a hurried preoccupation, ordered swiftly in an undertone. Helma waited until the *cameriere* had gone for their order.

"I was wondering why you picked out this place to-day," she remarked as an opening. "It's a little out of the way for both of us."

"Perhaps that's why," he answered in an easy acquiescence. "It's nice to be out of people's way to-day. If we don't feel like talking, we don't have to say a word here."

His tone was affable, and yet to her irritated nerves there was something displeasing in the off-hand manner in which he immediately took up the bill of fare apparently to study it anew, although she supposed that he had ordered fully the first time. He had not seen her for a week, and she

craved a more solicitous attention than a half-promise of silence.

Gonsalvo partook of the *antipasti*, and then the waiter brought them a steaming *minestrone*. But not once did her host break into speech, save for some extra instruction to the servant. When the spaghetti was at length before them, Helma felt that she must say something to lift the spell of the Spaniard's taciturnity.

"I was talking with Dubosc," she began, in a tone that she meant to be casual, but behind its weak defense she knew that she was as timorous as a hare. "He wants me to make my début in opera very soon now." There was a lack of inner conviction to sustain her, but she felt that at least she had kept her voice from faltering.

Gonsalvo resumed his study of the bill of fare. If he had only said something! But he did not utter a syllable or move a muscle.

"He thinks what I need most now is the discipline of stage work."

She knew she was making a sorry thing of it and she determined to say no more until he spoke. Her heart was beating unpleasantly. She had become annoyingly tremulous. . . Why didn't the man speak?

After what seemed an interminable interval he put down the card with a slight sigh. He grasped his fork and began twisting it in the spaghetti. He lifted the well-charged implement, poised it in the air, then buried most of its burden in his mouth, and proceeded to chew with a Latin gusto and thoroughness. When he had swallowed he put his fork down. He turned his head a little to one side and stared off as into a far distance.

This deliberate by-play was ill calculated to soothe raw nerves. Helma made a pretense of toying with the spaghetti in her plate, but she felt alone, deserted, and she had become aware that the chill of out-of-doors was seeping into the big room. She felt the impulse toward protection of the young child. Gonsalvo was solid and warm. She

would have liked to throw herself into his encircling arms and cry there against his shoulder. . . She looked over at him. His eyes were still staring vaguely into a corner. As a matter of course she crushed the infantile impulse, and a flush of shame at her own weakness gave her momentary warmth and vigor. She attacked her spaghetti with courage.

"You pay too much attention to that silly old Frenchman," the Spaniard, returned from his woolgathering, remarked in his most matter-of-fact way, as if the thing were scarcely worthy of his notice. "Some days he doesn't know *what* he's saying to his pupils. He's got an idea he *is* the *bel canto* he's always shooting off his face about. *Caramba,* he'll find himself among the nuts if he doesn't look out sharp! It'll be some time yet before *you're* ready for opera. If you listen to Dubosc you'd think the stage couldn't wait to have *you* singing on it. It's waited a good while. It can wait a little longer!"

With his last words his face puckered into a jocularity that to Helma's astonished gaze was positively revolting. . . He called imperatively to the waiter, and, with an air of enjoying a joke, buzzed off something rapidly that Helma could not catch at all.

"That's Neapolitan dialect," Gonsalvo told her as the fellow went away again. He seemed quite jovial about it. "A man doesn't live twenty years with a Neapolitan woman without picking it up. Some day you may learn it too. We'll have to get you a Neapolitan lover to teach it to you."

Helma made no reply. Astonishment, and anger, and a feeling of outrage that she had not known even on the morrow of Dubosc's birthday party were blindly battling within her against a sort of voiceless, numbing grief. And there was a dumb, hidden sense of something shattered. . . She dared not look, she dared not question. . . She was cold and tremulous and alone. . . She tried to show nothing outwardly and with frozen determination kept on eating, but

some betraying sign must have slipped through to the Spaniard's subtle gaze.

"I've ordered a special salad," he said in very much his old attentive tone. "We'll have a little chicken to go with it, *pollo arrosto*," and he rolled the Italian vocables pleasurably.

"I don't think I want any," Helma replied. It was out of the question for her to counterfeit hunger, although the evident concession in his voice had fortified her a little.

"Oh, yes, you must," he coaxed.

She could not tell exactly what had happened in Gonsalvo, but evidently he was now intent on making up to her for his recent rudeness. Still, that rankled . . . and, besides, how explain his spiteful words about Dubosc? . . . She was in command of herself and very much at attention.

The salad and the chicken arrived. Gonsalvo insisted on serving her himself and made quite a fuss over getting the dressing just right. He even summoned the *padrone* in consultation about the brand of oil. But all this ado was powerless to entice her appetite. The Spaniard, for his part, ate on with relish. But now and then he looked reproachfully at her neglected plate. When at length the fruit and coffee were before them, he sliced a quarter from an apple that he had peeled and passed it over to her on a fork.

"You're not eating enough to keep a baby alive," he said to her paternally. (The brick house, "almost a mansion," and the numerous flock in Flatbush flashed into her mind.)

"I'm not hungry to-day," she said simply.

"Well, you'll have to eat more than that," he went on in the tone of mild admonition that she could hear him using to his children when he told them if they left the breadcrusts on their plates their teeth would drop out. "Remember, you've got a voice to feed, and you're a pretty big girl, too."

It would have been easy to make some playful answer about obesity and *prime donne*. But, no! He just now

had sneered at her operatic prospects. . . Her heart sank again. Really it was all too intricate and baffling. She gave it up. And in reply she merely murmured:

"I wasn't hungry."

She leaned back in her chair and let her eyes wander as they would over the murky walls, the shabby palms, and the enigmatic figure of the Spaniard seated opposite. She was done with her luncheon.

Not so Gonsalvo. He poured himself a second cup of coffee, and, discarding a half-smoked cigarette, took from his pocket an imposing cigar which he first smelt of and then proceeded to eye from end to end and finally to trim. Helma gathered from this conscious deliberation that he was not at ease and might be pondering something more to say. Listlessly now she waited. He lighted his cigar, took a puff or two, and then he said it:

"Well, Helma," and even the ingrained secretiveness of the Spaniard and the practised cheerfulness of his calling could not wholly conceal some disquiet behind the studious manœuvre of his words, "you're going to be an opera singer, and, we all believe, in time a great one. But there's no such hurry about it as old Dubosc is forever telling you. There's a lot to do yet and certainly you'll do it. But we have a proverb in Spanish that says 'He runs fastest who runs slow.' "

He indulged again in a couple of long and leisurely puffs at his cigar. Then he added, like a cat which finally puts out its sly victorious paw to take the birdling that it has charmed: "I've been lazy about making out your contract. I'll give you one to sign in a few days now."

Helma obeyed an impulse which, though contrary to her whole past relation with Gonsalvo, mastered her before she had time to reflect: "I don't think I want to sign a contract yet. You may be quite right; perhaps I'm only half way there," she answered.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when their ironic echo frightened her. Her whole life with Gonsalvo,

on which most emphatically the sun had not been shining at all that day, seemed to totter. But though her heart quailed within her, something immutable and inexorable, older and infinitely stronger than she, rose out of nowhere and forbade her to retract her words.

She looked at him timidly across the table. He was not frowning, but his face was overspread with the darkness that for these matt Spaniards she knew to be the equivalent of a flush.

"Oh, yes, there's time enough," he replied casually.

He removed his cigar from his mouth, crushed out its burning ember, and dropped the stub into his empty cup. Then abruptly he called for the check.

Again in the street, they turned toward Broadway, buffeted by the March blast. Each went as if alone, without a word to the other. A trolley-car was bowling up town at an unusually smart pace. Gonsalvo grabbed his hat to his head and with an "I'm in an awful hurry, excuse me," bolted for it and jumped on to the rear platform without the car's coming to a stop.

Helma stood on the corner half-dazed; not humbled, but curiously diminished. The wind seemed to her to redouble its frozen fury. She was chilled to the very marrow. She felt she should congeal if she stood there a minute longer. So she made the effort and braced herself for the walk to Mrs. Wilkins's.

CHAPTER XIV

At home and restored to a reasonable degree of warmth, Helma strove to bring order into her recollection of the singular luncheon. It was a painful process and it reached no stable issue. As soon as she had reviewed the meagre facts, she set to reviewing them again. One thing was certain, she had never before seen Gonsalvo in anything like the mood of to-day, and the thought of it gaped blackly. She turned her mental gaze away. How she wished he would ring

up and say just one word that would mean comfort to her troubled and lonely spirit.

But he did not ring up—neither that day, nor the next, nor the day after that. It was a hope deferred that literally was making the heart sick. She went through the routine of her lessons and her practising, but with each succeeding day it cost her more of an effort. An envelope from Winfield Gaines arrived and lay on her bureau. She had turned it over in her hand and admired the fastidious neatness with which the sender had sealed it in crimson wax, but she could not bear to open it, could not brave the wrench to another time and scene.

A letter from Bertha, actually the first since college, lay there too, forwarded from Byzantium. It had come a day before Gaines's, and she had summoned the courage to run hastily over its sprawling contents. . . Going to be married in June. . . A Cincinnati brewer. . . First a little trip to the Old Country with Pa and Ma. . . They would sail from New York. . .

Helma had put down the scrawl without tarrying to fix dates, thanking heaven that Bertha was ignorant of her address. But the impression persisted that they were to sail soon. From the mere thought of Bertha's uncompromising literalness she now turned as from a rasping physical contact.

When the morning of the third day had passed without any sign from Gonsalvo, the nebulous knowledge that *she* might ring *him* up took definite shape. But she had read in books of amorous women who hounded the object of their affection; she had read of them with disapproval and a measure of disgust. How foolish they were to make themselves such nuisances! If only they had waited and been wise. . . Now it was her portion to know how impossible a thing waiting may become.

She grasped feverishly at other terms to describe and excuse her growing purpose. Perhaps she had been rude; perhaps he had taken righteous umbrage at her coolness about

the contract. After all, wasn't it a very big thing for her, not even a beginner, to be offered any sort of contract by one of the most important lyric managers of the world? (Her overwrought feelings found the exaggeration natural.) Hadn't she behaved like an impertinent little upstart in response to his great kindness? Hadn't she been picayune and underbred, just like a spiteful singer in a village choir? . . . And then the impulse that originally directed her reply would return in another form, warning against the wiles of men and managers. . . She was just the proverbial child that has lost it way in the forest. Only Dubosc would have the knowledge of the paths to lead her out.

The words of Gonsalvo's outburst against Dubosc came trooping back, and over them echoed Dubosc's contemptuous allusion to the cunning of the Spaniard. . .

It was all too horribly tangled up for her, and she did feel so helpless and alone. Yes, she must ring up Gonsalvo. So, suddenly strong in the impulse, she rose to make it fact, brutally crowding every other thought out of her mind and going straight for her goal in the blind impetuosity of one who has found for herself the formula that gives to passion the might of right.

Helma put on her hat and coat. She would not be heard calling up Gonsalvo from Mrs. Wilkins's telephone in the front hall. She went out to the privacy of a pay station.

She struggled with herself as to what she should say when she got him. She couldn't invite *him* to luncheon, much less suggest a visit. She would just ask him as gaily as she could whether he had been on time for his engagement the other day and leave the rest to him.

Gonsalvo was not in, his stenographer reported. Fearing lest the girl should recognize her voice if she asked when he would return, she hung up instantly. There was time to kill. She decided to walk. It was an aimless walk she took, staring into shop windows that held no interest for her, and it dragged endlessly.

At length she tried again at another pay station. This

time she asked the girl in charge to call for the number and get Mr. Gonsalvo. Who wanted to speak to Mr. Gonsalvo? came the impeding question. She quashed the impulse to give a fictitious name. "Miss Seymour," she replied.

Yes, Gonsalvo was at the telephone.

"Did you want to speak to me?" he asked with a business-like dryness.

Helma answered him in accordance wtih the treaty already made with herself.

"Yes," he replied, "I was in time, and I see *you* got home all right." Though laconic, he was not unamiable. For an awkward moment she waited, expecting, hoping that he would say something more. But there was no sound.

"I was just wondering," she half laughed, lamely.

"Is that all?" he clicked from the other end with the sharpness of a cutting machine.

"Ye-es," she faltered in an unhappy surprise.

"Well, you'll have to excuse me now. I'm just talking with somebody. I'll call you up one of these days." And he had rung off.

She groped her way home through the gathering dusk. She was hot with defeat and shame. She had made the venture that must not be made unless success crowns it.

Once in her room again she tried to find refuge in the thought that he really must have been very busy and that soon he would ring her up as of old. But days passed without any sign from him. For her they were days of torment. In her dismay she tried the antidote of a frenzied application to her work. At all costs she *would* make progress. Yet, curiously, Dubosc seemed anything but pleased with the results.

"Where is your poise gone, Helma?" he asked one morning, after a sorry tussle with the third act of "Aïda." "You're all out of time, child, and besides you're screaming like a calliope. Remember, it's Aïda you're singing, not Tosca. From you, this sort of thing won't do. Now, Miss

Brockway, we'll begin the scene again—back to the first bar, if you please."

Nothing seemed right to the bewildered girl. Even the one element that had flowed on like a river, steadily growing in fullness and strength, her singing, had been tainted by the poison of these torturing days, and for all her determination, her work, her very work, had gone awry. . . But she had to keep at it. What else was there for her . . . ?

When the morning after Dubosc's sharp reprimand she went to take her usual lesson, the Maestro was not there. Miss Brockway, however, asked her to wait. Maestro, she said, had had to go to see his landlord—some repairs that he'd declined to pay for. Maestro despised those kind of disputes and had gone out grumbling about the troubles of artists and the way the landlords always wanted to cheat them.

"But," she added, "you know Maestro has a way with him when he wants to, and he may be just so polite to that landlord that he'll come back without paying one penny of repairs and with an agreement in his pocket to do over the studio and the parlor too. They're certainly diplomats, those Frenchmen, when they lay themselves out to be!"

This, Helma reflected, was an astonishingly long speech for the untalkative Miss Brockway. More than once when they had been left alone together for a few minutes, the accompanist had confined her remarks to the weather and to some innocuous compliment about the nice progress that Miss Seymour was making. It had seemed an absolute breach of prudence when one day she confessed that she had played for several other singing teachers, but that she was perfectly sure none of them took such pains with a pupil as Maestro.

This speech, however, must have slipped some bolt. Miss Brockway seated herself on the piano stool, her back to the keys.

"Do you know, Miss Seymour," she declared, "I'm positively glad I've not got a voice! You may think it's a pretty stupid life to sit here day after day, all day long, playing accompaniments for one pupil after another that just happens to have freak vocal cords. But I can tell *you* it isn't the worst life for a woman."

Miss Brockway paused and appeared to study the ceiling. Helma was really so surprised by this outburst, mild though it was, that she found herself curious to hear more.

"Probably you are right," she encouraged her, secretly afraid lest the accompanist repent of her indiscretion and stop there.

Withdrawing her eyes from the ceiling, Miss Brockway began again.

"I never say anything to anybody, Miss Seymour." She had dropped her voice almost to a whisper. "I don't know why I should to you this morning; but sometimes my blood does boil, though you mightn't suspect it."

Certainly Helma had suspected nothing of the sort. What was she about to learn?

Miss Brockway went on rapidly: "When I see a fine, clean American girl like you, making her way honestly, and then see what she's got to put up with from the hussies that crowd this business, and from the evil, base men you all have to deal with, then sometimes I could almost scream! Really, I could, Miss Seymour. But as a rule I keep my mouth shut, because it's none of my business, and who's going to thank me for meddling?" And she closed her mouth with the decisiveness of a shutting trap.

Helma was listening intently. Miss Brockway's words had aroused and alarmed her. She couldn't let things stop short here. She must spur Miss Brockway to keep on.

"Oh, there are so many stories going around this gossipy world of ours," she answered, assuming a disdain well calculated to provoke response. "Do you really find that you can believe much of what you hear?"

Miss Brockway appeared to meditate a moment. Then, after a hasty glance at the door, as if to guard against being overheard she resumed in a still lower tone:

"Well, now, it's just like this," she said, "and I depend on you not to give me away. There's that botchy Miss Everell—Dolores—what a silly name! You don't hear *her* singing any more, do you? Well, Maestro changed the hour of her lessons some time ago. He didn't want anybody to hear her. She's got that gorgeous voice and she pays awfully well for her lessons. There's some rich old woman behind her who insists on her studying with Maestro, or, you can depend upon it, *she* would never put up with a second lesson from *him,* strict as *he* is. You see, she's got the notion that her voice and what she calls her personality are enough. And she's so careless! I don't think she's really learned one thing in the last three months. And the way Maestro talks to her sometimes! . . ."

Miss Brockway lifted her hands from her lap in reminiscent horror.

"You wouldn't believe that polite Frenchman capable of such talk, Miss Seymour!"

Helma recalled their own little tiff over the "Trovatore" poison scene.

"Oh, no, *she* wouldn't study with him," Miss Brockway insisted, "if the old woman didn't make her. Her lessons and her living depend on it—at present. But Maestro mayn't keep her on anyhow. Why, the other day she sang the same passage over three times making exactly the same mistakes. It was 'Carmen,' second act. The rhythm's a little tricky where Carmen's singing and the trumpets play off stage. But then, any girl that's got a note of music in her ought to get it right in a few minutes if she applies herself. Well, when she did it the third time in the same sloppy way, Maestro got furious. He asked her if her alphabet went B, C, A. She was perfectly brazen about it. She told him he was a regular old schoolmarm, that she'd heard Calvé in 'Carmen' half a dozen times, and Calvé never

sang it in rhythm, and that all this fussing about the dust on the moulding—that's what she said—was only a waste of *her* time, that she came to him to learn the business of opera and that he was holding her back on stuff her first kindergarten teacher could have taught her just as well, simply because he wanted the money the lessons brought in.

" 'Now,' she had the impudence to say him, 'you go ahead and attend to the business you're engaged for, which is teaching me the répertoire I'm going to sing in South America.' " (South America!) " 'If you ever waste another hour of my time and Mrs. Woolsey's money going over and over twenty measures like that because you want me to sing like a metronome, I'll simply walk out of this place and never come back. Any Dago organ-grinder can teach an opera better than that!' "

"What did the Maestro do?" Helma asked, curbing another and clamorous question that must bide her time. . . If only Dubosc didn't come in and interrupt!

"Why, he turned as red as a beet, and you know how pale Maestro is. I was trembling; I didn't know *what* he would do. But Maestro really is a wonderful gentleman. He just said, 'Do whatever you like, Miss Everell, but you can depend upon me to deny responsibility for any pupil who leaves my studio without my written endorsement.' That was day before yesterday. She hasn't been back since. I don't know what they're going to do now. Of course, I haven't asked *him*. After all, it's not *my* business and I'm *not* a meddler."

Miss Brockway spoke the last words with an emphasis which indicated that she was closing the gates on the flood of confidences. But there was something that Helma had to know, quickly, before Dubosc returned.

"You just now mentioned South America," she said with a bland dissembling of her eagerness.

"Oh, yes," returned Miss Brockway. "Why, don't you know about that?"

"No."

"Why, that's the company Gonsalvo is getting up—for the spring and summer, he says. Maestro doesn't take much stock in it. . . Then you're not going to be the leading soprano?"

Miss Brockway seemed a little surprised as she put this query.

"Not that I know of. I really haven't heard anything about it—as yet," Helma fibbed, though Dubosc's allusion of the other day burned vividly in her mind.

"Well, maybe you're not to go along," continued Miss Brockway. "But I supposed you were in on it. . . Miss Everell, I guess, is banking everything on this tour. I think she's got the old lady to put money into the scheme, and that she's scared to death for fear if she leaves Maestro, as she'd like to, he'd do something that would throw her plans out of kilter. That's why I expect to see her back in the studio any day. . . Of course Maestro wouldn't do anything malicious," she added quickly. "But he might convince the old lady that she doesn't know how to sing. And from his point of view she certainly does not."

Then of a sudden Miss Brockway burst out with the heat of a genuine indignation:

"It's perfectly scandalous the way that Everell girl has been carrying on. When she found she could get results *that* way, she made a dead set at Gonsalvo. It didn't take her long, you may be sure. That filthy Spaniard's got a past that would stretch from here to Sandy Hook"—Miss Brockway was waxing almost splendid in her wrath—"still he's always getting tangled up with the newest '*bella donna*' —sounds like a drug store, doesn't it?—and Miss Everell's got him twisted right around her little finger. I understand she lunches with him nearly every day now in some low-down Spanish boardinghouse, and she gives herself all the airs of running his business and him too. There's nothing retiring about *her*, you know. She's positively bragging of her conquest. Of course there's money in it for

Gonsalvo, besides his '*bella donna.*' Oh, he's a sly one! All his kind are! Why, he even fixed over his name—it used to be Gonzalez, or something like that—to make it sound grander. . . She may think she's got the South American opera troupe right in her own hands, but believe me, Gonsalvo knows who's going to boss the outfit. Why, if somebody should whisper to her old lady what's going on behind the scenes, the money would stop just like that! . . . Oh, Miss Seymour, when I see as I must the rottenness of this business and what a good straight girl like you has got to contend against even to get a first start, I drop right down on my knees and thank God he spared me from having a voice!"

Miss Brockway did not suit the action to the word this time, but instead got up and began energetically to rearrange the stacks of music lying on the piano.

It was evident to Helma that she would say no more. But what she had said was almost enough. . . Helma sat in her chair grasping its arms, her eyes half closed. She hoped that Miss Brockway was not noticing her. . .

Presently Dubosc came in, cheery and debonair. It was evident that he had won his pleading.

"Only a little scale work this morning," he declared, "to keep the voice in running order. There's hardly time left for a regular lesson."

But the way the voice behaved induced Dubosc to ask as he escorted her to the door:

"What is the matter with my little Helma? She doesn't seem herself these days?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . Nothing, I guess . . . I feel all right. . ."

She tried to look into his face and smile, realizing all the time what a dismal failure she was making.

"Perhaps she's just tired," he said indulgently, giving her shoulder an affectionate pat. "That happens to everybody. Try taking a day or two off. You've really been working very hard lately . . . too hard, too feverishly.

Don't come up to-morrow, or the day after, either, unless you feel absolutely fit."

He pressed her hand warmly as he opened the street door. . . Yes, Dubosc was very kind. She gratefully acknowledged the fact as she descended the steps. But her whole being was full of a heaviness that was not kind.

All the way home, Helma, turn where she would, was conscious of an enemy that she had read about in books and known from the lips of hearsay, a mean, unworthy enemy. As yet she did not grapple with it, loth thus explicitly to own its presence or honor it with a name. Come what might, she would keep it at bay! But it was cunning, a strategist, her foe; for all her willing, it refused to be at bay.

CHAPTER XV

Once more among the scratched black walnut and tarnished moquettes of Mrs. Wilkins's upper room, Helma recalled as well as she could the sum of Miss Brockway's indiscretions. . . So that was it!—the South American tour, the contract proffered her after sudden words of discouragement, and Miss Everell. . . Miss Everell, Miss Everell everywhere, *her* money, *her* career, *her*. . . Yes, that was it! And now she understood with eyes that saw again the days of neglect and the capricious switch from the Spanish boarding-house to the Italian restaurant. Yes, there was not the shadow of a protecting doubt inviting her to refuge. Her eyes were opened and she understood.

So it was all a money scheme. The Spaniard would tie her up in a contract that should cover years, as many years as he dared propose. She should not sing till he pleased, and then only when and where he pleased. And meantime, pirate-like, he had had his pleasure of her! While she—"A past that would stretch from here to Sandy Hook"; "He's always getting tangled up with the newest '*bella donna*.'"

Miss Brockway's words reared themselves in her mind like

serpents. And she? She had wasted herself, thrown away her girlhood, on this ignoble lady-killer, this cheap Spanish masher, with his mansion of brick and his unending brood in Flatlands! Just because he could cajole and there was something provocative about his animal, exotic, Latin way, and one wintry night she'd gone to a party and eaten and drunk of their treacherous cheer! . . . The shame of it was burning her up.

She threw herself on the bed, plunging her face into the coolness of the pillows. But the accusing thoughts pressed after her like the shock troops of an assaulting army.

And then, by a fiendish shift, Miss Everell stood on her mind's stage—the sumptuous sultana of the contralto voice, jeering down at her. . .

With a swift resurgence of life, she sprang up from the bed and strode over to the washstand and bathed her burning cheeks and eyes in the cold water. Then she went to the mirror and energetically began to rearrange her disordered hair. Action of some sort *must* be taken.

Her mind was pitched and whetted to an instant keenness of invention. In a trice she had it: Bertha! Here was the solution! Feverishly she ransacked the bureau for Bertha's neglected letter. Yes, there it was, hidden under some handkerchiefs. She tore the envelope from the paper folded within and devoured its contents with a searching attention that she had not given it before. . . Yes, yes, her memory had served her. It was this very week that Bertha was to sail. Probably, the letter said, they would stop at the Fifth Avenue Hotel; Pa always did when he went to New York. . . She would ring up Bertha right away and invite her for luncheon to-morrow. She would take her to the Spanish basement where, according to Miss Brockway, Gonsalvo was lunching almost daily in company with Miss Everell. Bertha, fascinated by the strangeness of the adventure, would see nothing in all this that she ought not to, but she, Helma, thus companioned and bolstered with the courage of a friendly presence, would see everything.

Yes, there was the solution. Helma did not pause to let her mind work further. With an assured step she went downstairs to the telephone, not even allowing herself a reasonable doubt as to whether Bertha really was in New York and would be at the hotel so early in the afternoon. Only after she had given Central the number did she feel a moment of wild misgiving. It did not last. Bertha was there and answered.

"You beauty! You *are* in New York and you never wrote me a single line!"

Helma knew the justice of the charge, which came over the wire with all the well-remembered Crumbacker emphasis. She did not attempt to excuse herself now. To-morrow she would explain everything. (It was amazing to herself that the letter so joyously intended after the audition at Dubosc's had been put off from busy days to busier.) Resolutely she went on with her purposeful invitation.

Bertha accepted on the spot. To-day she and her parents were all booked up. You see she'd never heard from Helma or they'd have planned differently. But for lunch to-morrow, surely. The day after they would be sailing for Germany. Maybe something could be arranged with Helma for to-morrow night, too. She didn't know whether Paw and Maw had made any plans. They were out shopping now. But it would be grand if they could all go to the theatre together. Anyhow, they'd talk that over to-morrow. Meantime Bertha insisted that she was "just tickled to death" at the prospect of seeing something of what she termed the "real New Yawrk."

"I'll bet you know lots of those funny little places," she shouted.

Without stopping to go into that question, Helma set a time to call for Bertha at the hotel. She intended that they should reach the Spanish basement a full quarter of an hour after Gonsalvo.

This arrangement made, a huge load seemed to have rolled from her. She felt suddenly free, light, exultant. She should have Bertha—vigorous, indomitable Bertha—at her side. Byzantium had cast no shadow over Bertha, nor should Spain. Helma for the life of her could not have told anything that Bertha might be expected to do; it was just the fortifying fact of her presence.

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In the morning she got up briskly, filled with the energy of her undertaking. Bertha she found waiting for her in the hotel lobby, ready with a cry and a hug to begin again, she declared, right where they had left off. She hung on Helma's arm as they walked in the direction of the Spanish luncheon, her tongue put to it to utter her crowding thoughts. Yes, the fellow she was going to marry was a perfect old duck—only he wasn't old at all—and that would be the month after they got back from Germany. But all that could wait. She *must* know first about Helma, and, by the way, had Helma heard from old Phoeb'? She'd only had one postal herself, the four-flushing rascal!

"He's scarcely written to me, either," Helma answered. "But I had a note from him only the other day. He's at Harvard now taking a special course after spending all last year in Europe."

"And you mean to say he hasn't run over here to see you?"

"Not yet."

"Well, I'll be jiggered! That *is* devotion for you! Crazy old Phoeb'! I wonder if he's getting along any better at Harvard than he did back at Byzant'?"

"Oh, I fancy so."

"But how about yourself, you old dear? Come awn now, everything!"

Helma found that she must tell something of what had gone on in New York. The lessons were progressing well.

Her new professor really seemed to be pleased with her; he was working her hard at operas now, and he had nothing but praise for what Spinti had taught her.

"I did do my duty there," Helma protested, almost blithely now. "Even if I *thought* my letters to you, I did sit down and write one to Spinti. But he hasn't answered yet."

"Why, Spinti's dead!" exclaimed Bertha, in a tone of evident astonishment.

"Spinti's dead!" a voice clicked back in Helma's brain. She looked inquiringly at Bertha, surprised at her own lack of a more vivid reaction to words that ought to stir her deeply.

"Yes," said Bertha. "Then you didn't know? Well, you *are* out of touch with Byzantium!" They were walking more slowly, and Bertha's forthright tones had dropped to a softness which was new in Helma's ears. "He died early last January," Bertha resumed. "Daisy Farrington wrote me about it. Maybe you don't remember her. She was that red-haired girl from somewhere in Wisconsin, roomed in the same house with me. She was a sort of star pupil of the poor old fellow after you went away. But I guess there was too much difference between stars. He was failing all fall, Daisy says, but he never stopped talking about you, right up to the very end. Your name was about the last word he spoke before he gave up the ghost—'*La bella voce di Helma*,' or whatever they say in Eyetalian. He didn't seem to have anything left to live for when you'd gone. . . Well, he was a wonder all right! Poor old Spinti! . . . And you hadn't heard?"

"I'm surprised, if he wasn't able to answer my letter himself," said Helma, "that somebody at the *Gasthof* didn't write for him, or at least let me know when he died."

"Oh, you don't realize how those people are. It's a labor of Hercules for them to write a letter. Probably they're intending to do it still—just like your letter to me."

Helma reflected, with a slight dismay, that the touch of

ill-timed levity had failed to make her wince. Spinti was dead. Words or fact, how little at this moment they meant to her.

The girls were nearly at the Spanish boardinghouse, and neither spoke again until they came to the grilled gate under the stoop that gave access to the basement dining-room.

All bows and polite attention, the proprietor greeted Helma and ushered the two into the house.

"Perhaps the ladies would like the table next to Mr. Gonsalvo's," the hospitable host suggested.

In the half-light of the discreetly shaded room Helma had immediately made out the back of Gonsalvo's head and shoulders at the farthest table down by the western of the two windows. Opposite to him and to her, in deeper shadow of the corner, sat Miss Everell, her face preternaturally white under the darkness of her hair and spreading hat. Her dress too was dark, Helma saw.

"No, we will sit down here," Helma answered the obliging fellow, and she stepped with decision to the nearest empty table on the right of the room, one removed from the door. But the metal in her yielded a bit, and where a brazen woman would have taken a chair facing the couple in the corner, leaving them no doubt as to just why she was there, Helma chose the other chair. Presenting her back to the table in the west front corner thus ostrich-like, she saved the face of her gentle breeding in the transparent fiction that she was merely an accidental visitor to this restaurant. She found, however, that she could not so much as raise her little finger without an inhibiting belief that at least one pair of eyes was scrutinizing every slightest move she made. Still she held herself in a certain rigidly self-conscious control.

Bertha seemed so effectively subdued by what she doubtless regarded as her first glimpse behind the veil of the "real New York" that not a single "What and in under the canopy?" issued from her lips.

Again the feverish wave of resolution rose in Helma, for

the moment steadying and strengthening her. She found herself ordering a very good luncheon with every appearance of confidence and poise; she could even smile across the little table at Bertha in a steely semblance of worldly wisdom and unshakable aplomb.

The couple in the corner must have begun their luncheon earlier than Helma had reckoned, since she had scarcely sent the waiter on his way when the dark figure of Miss Everell loomed beside her.

"Why, how do you do, Miss Seymour," the contralto greeted her, "you don't lunch here often, do you? Really I find it a very good place and such a relief from our everlasting American beefsteak and baked potatoes and apple pie."

Innocent as the words were, there was that in their very lack of apparent guile, as well as in the voice that spoke them, which was beyond mistaking to any woman of whatsoever tribe or hue.

Helma disregarded the subtler threads of the remark.

"The food *is* good," she agreed. "I'm introducing an old friend of mine right now to *arroz con pollo*. She never tasted that in Cincinnati. . . I want you two girls to know each other; Miss Everell, Miss Crumbacker." And she looked up with a labored smile into the white and slightly contemptuous face of the contralto.

Miss Everell recognized the intruder from the West with the merest nod and murmur, and then went on speaking as if exclusively to Helma:

"I have been lunching with Gonsalvo." ("Obviously," thought Helma.) "We have been discussing the details of the South American *tournée* he is inaugurating in May." (Miss Everell had mastered well the pompous terms traditional to impresario and press agent.) "You know I'm to be the star. You may think that's strange for a contralto. But really it isn't at all. We'll do principally the great contralto operas—'Carmen,' 'Samson,' 'Werther,' even 'La Favorita'—they like that old thing down there. And Gon-

salvo says perhaps I shall do the 'Barbiere' too. That would be in the original keys, of course. You probably don't know it was written for contralto first. And maybe I'll do Santuzza. Any voice like mine with a big range can sing Santuzza. Every Maestro I've studied with has told me *I* could."

"And Dubosc!" thought Helma; but what she said aloud, though she found the list more than a little wild, was an innocuous, "How very interesting!" but uttered with all the show of enthusiasm that she could muster.

"Yes, isn't it?" went on Miss Everell, now with more of warmth in her effrontery. "Of course if I had a soprano with me that I could trust for 'Aïda' I'd give that too. Amneris I think is the best rôle of my entire répertoire." (This from a girl who had never been on any stage, Helma reflected; Bertha was listening open-mouthed in the frankness of her wonderment.) And then Miss Everell fired her Parthian and parting shot: "I told Señor Gonsalvo" (she almost patted the "Señor" as she spoke) "I would like so much to have *you* for my Micaela and my Inez and the little sister—Oh, you know her name!—in 'Werther.' But he says you're not quite ready yet. So I'm taking along an Italian girl for those parts. I've heard her sing and really she's not bad at all, and she's ready to do a Violetta and a Gilda and a Marguerite on the off-nights when I don't appear. Of course the star can't sing every night. That's physically impossible."

Miss Everell paused airily and Helma nodded a mute assent.

"Too bad you're *not* ready now," Miss Everell resumed. "But some time you will be," she added in gracious prophecy. "Oh, here comes Gonsalvo!" And with the briefest inclination of her head, which took no more cognizance of Bertha's presence than if she had been a pitcher or a plate, the rising star of opera turned from them toward the door.

Gonsalvo, wearing his overcoat and his derby, came up behind her. He merely glanced at Helma's table, an unyield-

ing, impersonal glance that gave up nothing, lifted his hat slightly, and, without pausing at all, followed Miss Everell from the room.

What had she done? That question surged up to Helma as to a dismayed child. Nothing, perhaps, and yet . . . the contract. . . She bowed her head for a moment before this latest offensive of circumstance. Then, remembering Bertha and the waiting luncheon, she plunged back to the frowning present, and, as well as she might, pretended to eat. Of late, she could reflect, she had had the chance to become widely expert in that particular pretense!

Bertha was talking now, though in an awed *sotto voce*, grotesquely unlike her old assertive self. She *must* know who that girl was that was going to South America, and was she as good—that is, did she sing as well—as she thought she did? . . . And the fellow that came out after her . . . he was a handsome brute. . . Say what you like, these New York men *are* swell dressers! . . . Was he a manager, or a conductor, or another singer? . . . "And, say, Helma, you must be mighty good yourself if they considered you for that tour. . . Well, no wonder!"

Helma listened as well as she could to the unending flow of Bertha's questions and exclamations, all spoken but little above a whisper, which soon switched off from that Everell person and her escort to the food before them and the many marvels of New York, and thence to old Byzantine matters.

"And Spinti is dead," Helma repeated to herself, as if the words refused to register. . . She strove for more than a show of interest in what Bertha was saying, but about all that she could achieve was to keep her answers coherent. As she looked closely at the girl whom she had known so well in other years, she could only feel how hopelessly they were apart. Something while not of dowdiness yet of an unmistakable provinciality marked Bertha's whole appearance, and this, she knew, was only the outer symbol of inner differences. She found herself actually glad that Bertha was going away the next day. When the Crumbackers re-

turned from Europe, she would manage to get word to them that she was out of New York. As for the impending evening, nothing would induce her to spend it in their company. Perhaps Bertha mercifully had forgotten her project for the theatre.

But Bertha had not, and as they walked back toward the Fifth Avenue Hotel she announced that she had told her Paw to get the tickets and that she was sure he had done so.

"But, Bertha, I'm awfully sorry," Helma found herself saying. "I absolutely forgot that to-night's the night I promised my teacher to go with him to some musical friends of his who are getting up something or other that is of importance for me."

Bertha saved her from floundering further in the white lie.

"I know just how that must be, Helma," she said in the tone of gentle reasonableness. "But you can come and have dinner with us anyhow, can't you, and see the folks? They're crazy to meet you again—never saw you but once in Byzantium, and they've heard *so* much about you."

Again Helma had no choice but to fib. She only wished she *could* stay for dinner, but she'd got some practising she *must* do; after that a little rest, and then she'd just have time to dress and get up there; of course there would be supper where they were going,—so Helma kept on, a little amazed at her own inventiveness.

Bertha looked crestfallen, but insisted no further.

"Well, if it must be good-bye now, I suppose it must," she said, as they stood again in the lobby of the Fifth Avenue. "I'm terribly disappointed we aren't going to see any more of you this time, but when we come back in June . . ."

"Then, of course, I shan't be so busy," Helma heard herself promising glibly. Whereupon Bertha, for the first time since they had passed the enchanted grille of the Spanish basement, spoke out as a thorough-going Crumbacker:

"Helma, you've changed a lot. I wonder if I have too." It was all that she said, but it did its work.

"Oh, don't say that, dear!" exclaimed Helma, seized by remorse.

For answer Bertha kissed her and without another word turned and walked toward the elevators.

Helma checked an impulse to run after her. Where was the use? At any rate, she had played through her bitter scene without disclosing to Bertha a hint of her inward distress. And now that the little wrench of parting was over, she really felt relieved that Bertha finally had left her. So she went out from the hotel and began the short walk back to Mrs. Wilkins's.

But now another thought tormented her. What earthly good had come to her of all this carefully elaborated adventure? What did she really know that she had not known before? Where were her intolerable relations with Gonsalvo altered in the slightest? Now she faced the grim and mystifying trouble of her day with no further fever of resolve to buoy her upward and along, and not even such defense as Bertha's presence afforded against the shuddering question of her nerves and a stark answering reality. How idiotic to have hoped in Bertha! Not Bertha or any other earthly creature could be of the slightest use except the one who had brought the whole dreadful thing about. For a moment she saw the image of poor little Spinti, grizzled, monkey-like. "Spinti is dead" . . . It was only a flash of mockery in the vacancy. She knew, for she would have given worlds if she could have cried. Only this enigma was real. What if she had not guessed the answer? But how could she doubt that she had? . . . Meantime she walked on.

Her room seemed chilly and the marble top of the bureau was icy to her touch through the flimsy, much-laundered cover that strayed across it. Her fingers fished her watch out from behind a faded velvet pincushion where the housemaid had evidently shoved it. It was a little chased silver watch which her father had given her the day she was twelve. But that fact, such as it was, no longer counted.

The hands of the watch stood at ten minutes past three. What should she do?

She sat down in one of the shabby easy-chairs. No mistaking, the room was chilly. That Mrs. Wilkins economized on coal as far as she dared Helma had observed before. She pulled her blanket shawl from the bed and put it behind and around her and twisted her hands tightly into its folds.

What should she do? . . . What *was* there for her to do?

If not in so many words, Helma was conscious of the human predicament which follows the abrupt and complete interruption of an imperious habit. Byzantium, she had known from the moment that she had boarded the express for New York, was only a fictive possibility in case the career should not pan out. And all the bridges that led for her to Byzantium had been burned, once and forever, in the aftermath of Dubosc's birthday party.

Her subsequent life, she reflected with a pitiless clearness, had consisted of two elements—her career and Gonsalvo. Only now did she realize what the loss of Gonsalvo would mean. For days she had been building about herself counterfeit battlements of hope. They had vanished like shapes of mist before the east wind of reality. And lo, with their vanishing not even the career was left!

She tried to tell herself that she must have courage, that she must work. . . Why? . . . At what? . . . Shame, pride, anger, jealousy, vengeance. . . She could recall such vocables, parrot-like, from an academic past. But they meant as much to her as to the brain of a parrot. In the grey completeness of her desolation nothing spoke a language which she could understand. . . She leaned toward the bureau and looked again at her watch. It registered twenty-five minutes to four. She wished that the human mechanism only were like a watch and that within a few hours at the utmost it would quietly run down.

Then, like lightning, the scene in the Spanish basement

quivered in her brain. She saw again the superb impudence of Miss Everell and behind her the matt-faced Spaniard skulking away without a word. She heard and saw, and of a sudden she saw red. The blood came coursing up through her body. There hummed in her brain three lines of Tennyson, remembered from some toiling college preacher:

O well for him whose will is strong!
He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong.

In spite of the ironic dubiety of the last line, the words called to action. She quitted the chair and the comfortable folds of her shawl, put on her coat and hat, and deliberately walked down the stairs and out of the house. She went as a horse in blinders, looking only ahead. She had a purpose, a port to make; it was all that she knew. She made for it as a hurt child for the refuge of sheltering arms. There was but one thought in her whole being, the absolute need of seeing Gonsalvo. . .

Three persons were seated on the three chairs of the unchanging row in the outer office. The three were men. She took no further stock of them.

"I'll make a place for you to sit down over here, Miss Seymour," obligingly remarked the little typist. And she cleared a litter of papers from a bench set against the wall at right angles to the door. There Helma settled herself, idly resting her hands in her lap, and was content to wait.

After a time the ground-glass door marked "Private" opened. A strange man stepped from within, put his hat on, and went out into the hall without looking up. She could see that Gonsalvo was greeting one of the men who had risen from the row of chairs, and with his arm familiarly on the fellow's shoulder was indicating the inner office.

"I can't see you just yet, Miss Seymour; I'm busy with these gentlemen," Gonsalvo spoke with his hand on the ground-glass door ready to close it. His tone was professional and non-committal.

"I'll wait," Helma replied as colorlessly.

The typist ticked away at her machine. One after the other the remaining occupants of the row of chairs went into the inner office, and one after the other they came out again and disappeared into the hall.

"I can see you now, Miss Seymour."

Gonsalvo was standing in the open door of his lair. She rose obediently and crossed the room. He motioned her to one of the leathern easy-chairs. He closed the door and sat down in his swivel-chair, his back to his desk. There were the beginnings of dusk in the room. From beyond the partition she could hear the clicking of the typewriter.

She looked at Gonsalvo. His face was flat and inexpressive like a calcimined wall. His deep eyes seemed to have shrunk; they were veiled and impenetrable.

"Well, what is it that brings you here now?" he asked with that neutrality of voice which with men of fiery race is a species of insolence and may screen a conflagration.

The bluntness of the question left her helpless. Whatever words she might have assembled flew scattering in the murky distress of her mind. She clasped and unclasped and reclasped her hands, gripping them tightly. A dry, hard sob that she strove to restrain escaped. The intermittent tapping of the typewriter clattered on the silence in its mechanical unconcern.

She saw the dark shadow of anger creep over the Spaniard's face as he looked intently at her, drawing down the corners of his mouth in a half-scowl. Suddenly her whole being cried out to her that this was ridiculous, unreal, impossible. A wave of affection, of tenderness spread over her. She leaned toward Gonsalvo and extended hands at once forgiving and entreating.

The Spaniard took her wrists firmly in his strong grasp and set her hands back in her lap with decision.

"Wait a moment," he said in a low tone, and he got up and went into the next room, shutting the ground-glass door behind him.

She leaned back in the chair, her eyes half closed, but her nerves and senses painfully alert. She could hear him speaking to the typist. The click of the machine stopped. There was a rustling as of preparation for departure. Presently the door into the hall shut audibly. Then Gonsalvo reopened the ground-glass door, which he did not shut behind him. He sat down again in his swivel-chair, facing her. The twilight was deepening, but the grey pallor of his face was still distinctly discernible. He did not turn on the electricity.

She looked up at him expectantly, almost hopefully.

"So you came here to make a scene," he said. His voice now was neither raised nor lowered, but it froze her back into herself.

"No," she protested, but only half aloud.

"Well, you'd better not." His tone had a note of tigerish relish in it. "We don't tolerate scenes in this office. Not any scenes of that sort. Of course if a lady is very *amorosa*, if a lady feels her only consolation is in our arms" . . .

A rising fury had given her speech: "I came here to talk business," she interrupted him.

Gonsalvo dropped immediately his tone of a cajoling pasha.

"Business!" he almost sneered. "I told you the other day there's no business at present. If you want a contract for the future, I've offered it to you. I gave you your chance. But you said you didn't want it. I suppose you've got some other bright idea tucked away; some trickery that old sly-dog of a Dubosc put you up to. Well, you don't put anything over on me!" Gonsalvo had now switched to the position of the aggrieved party. "The trouble with you is you've listened so long to all this nonsense that your head's got so swelled there's no doing anything with you. . . Well, anyhow *I* can tell you you're not ready for opera yet." He had discarded his habitually prudent and even voice; he was becoming positively shrill. "When you *are* ready, then you can call again and we'll see what we can

do. That won't be to-morrow. Until then it's good-bye." He had fallen back into his conversational tone. "Coming around like this you're just wasting your time and mine. And I haven't got any time to waste."

He pulled his big gold watch out of his waistcoat pocket and consulted it in the dim light.

But her sudden access of strength had not deserted her. She could speak to him good-humoredly, as to a child, brushing this nonsensical misunderstanding away.

"O Mike, what's the use of all this? How can you talk that way to *me?*"

"To *you!*" His laugh was low, but hard. "Why in God's name shouldn't I?"

"Why, after all that's been between us," she spoke softly and hesitantly; she would have liked to add her real affection for him, but she could not quite.

Even in the gloom the Spaniard's face seemed to splinter into a hundred angles.

"Between *us!*" he spoke very quietly, but his voice was as dynamic as a scream. "You said between *us!* Do you think you *own* me? Do you think you're *married* to me? I give you my word, sometimes I used to believe you did. Well, it's over *now*. *All* over. Now and forever! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! . . . Between us!" and his chuckle died away as if the notion was too preposterous even for a laugh. "Why, if it hadn't been me, it would have been some other guy. You girls all come down here to New York and go crazy for a man. You were just waiting for somebody, like a ripe fruit to be plucked." His tone was almost genial now. "Your art, as you like to call it, your voice, where would they be if it hadn't been for me? My heavens, you'd be singing like an old maid steeped in wine of Tarragona that had stood one day too long on the hillside in the sun! . . . Why, Helma, if you were a fair woman, you'd go down on your bended knees to me and thank me for the way I've treated you. Suppose instead of falling in with a safe man like me, a man who had your welfare at

heart, you'd have picked up one of those flashy Broadway hawks and he'd have given you a baby and you'd have been turned out on the street, and then skedaddle—no voice, no art, nothing but you and the brat!" . . . The Spaniard paused in his eloquence for breath.

Even in her dismay and anger Helma was not wholly insensible to the ludicrous side of this address, but, as Gonsalvo went blandly and deliberately on, her deep and waxing sense of outrage obliterated everything else. . . So this was all! . . . She had given everything, and this was all! Without putting it into so many words, it was the sickening discernment of a difference, as of stratum against stratum of living rock, that cut her hopelessly from this voluble Spaniard, whom, she now knew, with a helpless nakedness, she had loved . . . still . . . (it burnt like fire in her throat) . . . still loved.

"You are very unjust, Mike," she heard herself saying calmly, amost glibly.

"Oh, that's it, is it? I'm unjust!" His laugh crackled like stoneware struck by a hammer. "All right, have it your own way, I am unjust! But when you're ready to make that career of yours, you'll be whining outside of M. Gonsalvo's door and damned glad and grateful if he'll open it an inch to you! That's you! You're all alike, you singing bitches! All you know how to do is to pretend! *Carajo!*" . . .

The Spaniard's fluency died in an indignation that to Helma's astounded ears was becoming moral and general. She had a grotesque glimpse of a Methodist exhorter she once, in giggling gaiety, had gone to hear at Byzantium. The memory was ghastly.

By now the room had grown quite dark, save for a white glow of electric light that entered one window from the neighboring street lamp. As it fell on Gonsalvo he looked almost uncanny. She shut her eyes, trembling, nauseated. But the wayward impulse of tenderness rose again in a sudden tide and broke through the barrier of silence.

She opened her eyes and leaned forward as if to grasp him.

"Come now, Mike," she said in a voice from which she strove to keep the pleading out. "This is madness. I'm Helma. Let's forget it like a bad dream. . ."

"I guess it isn't any dream." He spoke in the most ordinary tone, and, getting up, turned to the window and seemed to scan the street. Then he took out his watch again and examined it in the pale light from the street lamp.

"Look here," he went on in the same tone, half turning toward her, "you've been here long enough. You know your way home. Well now, *va là, va là, ragazza!* And don't you dare show your pasty face around this office again until I send for you, big slut! When I'm ready I'll do that, not a moment sooner. While you're waiting, you might learn to sing not *quite* so much like an iceberg. You'd think *my* lessons had thrown a little heat into you, but I guess *they* were wasted too!" He chuckled in a fatuous tribute to his own wit.

"Now look here, Miss Seymour," he went on, "I want your room; I don't want your company. On your way now; one, two, three . . ."

"You brute!"

If she meant her voice to be withering, she made a dismal failure of it. And she knew it through her trembling and her tears.

"I'm a brute now, am I?" he spoke slowly without raising his voice. "Well, I'll tell you what you are," and the scriptural monosyllable fell on ears incredulous of the very sound. "Now, this time," he said, "you're going, and you're not coming back." He took her almost amorously by the shoulders, led her across the main office and into the hall.

"Now, goodnight," he finished, in hard, subdued syllables, whose finality there was no mistaking.

Incapable of further protest or retort, she descended the the stairs like an automaton that had been set in motion, and

so walked out of the house and down the outside steps. On the sidewalk she almost bumped into a woman whose tall approaching figure was silhouetted against the street lamp at the corner.

"Oh—Miss Seymour—Good evening," lilted like a mocking song from the woman's obscured face.

Helma did not answer Miss Everell. She did not turn from her straight road. She was dumb with astonishment, anger, incredulity, outrage, grief. Bending forward and holding her muff against her mouth, she made with the blind instinct of a sorely wounded animal for the only shelter she knew, Mrs. Wilkins's door.

CHAPTER XVI

In the hall the rattle of dishes and the shrill or raucous voices of the "family" rose from the basement along with a sickening smell of food. Dinner was in full swing. Helma fled from it up the stairs, flight after flight. Somehow she undressed herself and, shivering, crawled under the bed clothes. She had not taken time to light the gas, much less to open a window for the night, or to draw down the shades. Her bed was not a refuge; it was a stopping-place. And by degrees her mind stopped, wearied out with its labyrinthine round. The pall of sleep, heavy, unyielding, descended upon her.

It was an early hour for her to go to sleep and she was awake before there was more than the suspicion of the new day beyond the limp lace of Mrs. Wilkins's window-curtains and the unshaded sashes next them. First she was vaguely conscious of something wrong, and then the whole miserable chronicle of yesterday unrolled itself in relays of memory until at last the sordid story was complete. How perfectly it fulfilled another awakening only a few weeks back! . . . She lay there quiet, as the colorless daylight gathered strength, and in the neutral lucidity of the March morning looked steadily at the picture—the old phenomenon of

silly confidence and betrayal. She, because she was Helma Seymour, had supposed herself immune, sacrosanct! And the man, the cheap, shoddy, cunning, hot-blooded, heartless sensualist, too ignorant to spell a commercial letter correctly!

Again, she saw Gonsalvo in another light; she remembered that caste and schooling and "principles of conduct" are man-made ephemera. She saw Gonsalvo as the human male divested of the fictions of our miscalled civilization, the male designed by God, by nature, by whatever deaf, unpitying power has placed us here, to fulfill his part in the appointed destiny of man and woman. She saw, and, seeing, groaned aloud, for across her vision fell the hateful shadow of the Everell girl. . . In her torment she shut her eyes and lay there, arms outstretched, in crucifixion, heedless of the steady passing on of time. . .

A tapping of finger-nails on the panel of her door aroused her to a heart-thumping alertness.

"Are you awake, Helma honey?"

It was the professional carolling of Mrs. Wilkins, just as on that other morning of her intrusive solicitude. On no account must the meddler enter and behold the disorder of the room; the undrawn shades, the shut windows.

Helma effected a drawling reply that she was awake but meant to go to sleep again.

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry if I woke you up," went on the shrill cooing outside the door. "Sure you don't want any coffee, dear, or anything else I can bring you?"

Helma answered in the negative, now with some asperity.

"*All* right, dear, have a good sleep," and Mrs. Wilkins's heavy footsteps receded in the stairway. Momentarily annoying though Helma found the interruption, it had drawn in and concentrated her mental stream until all her thought was focussed on a single point: how should she go on—on through the days, the weeks, the months, the years . . . ? And while thought beat issueless upon this question, something heavy, as a vague, inchoate weight, held her fast to the bed. There was no incentive, no desire impelling her

to move. She lay in the plight of one who bodily is as dead, though the mind pulse on. Yet she dreaded hers turning from the definite channel of its unanswered course into that dim penumbra of her brain where anguish stalked.

But gradually her mind must have grown numb, for a new thought had stolen up on it and now struck it unawares.

She would sing!

The idea was enough. To sing! Had she forgotten that? She jumped from her bed. Close as the room was, the shock of its colder air hit her fevered body with the chill of water. Her teeth chattering, she threw on her dressing-gown and opened the register, which let up a mild and faintly gaseous warmth from Mrs. Wilkins's jealously guarded furnace. She was now fully awake and even tremblingly alert. . . She would sing! . . . But first she must have her tub and get into some clothes. . .

When at length she was partly dressed, it was the moment for singing. She went to the piano and struck A, the A of immemorial orchestral tuning. She strove to utter it. Not a sound, only an unyielding thickness in the throat. Instead of forcing out a tone, cost what it might, she stopped. The vocal cords, she reflected, are always relaxed in the morning. It takes some time, Dubosc had said, to "make the voice." And the "making" must be gentle, gradual. "Don't be impatient with your throat and, above all, never force" . . . She went on with her dressing methodically and then walked over again to the piano. This time she sat down and struck a chord prefatory to running scales. Once more not a sound.

Now she tried very, very gently to coax some voice, just a weeny little bit of tone. None came. Then with a sudden fury she took a tremendous breath and pressed on her larynx with all the force of lungs and diaphragm. This time there was a sound, but what a sound! And she knew if she did it again something must inevitably give way. She

swung around on the piano stool, her hands limp in her lap. She had heard of sudden loss of voice; she had heard of nodes, of paralysis of the vocal cords; she had heard— But what had she not heard and what was the use of it all? . . . If anything more was needed, this was it!

Dubosc, a doctor, a specialist—the thoughts chased into her brain. But with them came the memory of yesterday flooding, over-powering everything, and with it the sickening knowledge that it was something no specialist could diagnose, no Dubosc could cure. Mechanically she got up and went toward the front of the room. From the mirror in the bureau the image of a tall blond woman, darkly clad, stood before her in a reflected impartiality. The woman was young, many would call her comely, but from the haggard paleness of the face and the dead, sunken eyes, something looked at her that caused her to gasp and turn away. She stepped to a window, pushed aside the dejected lace, and gazed into the street. It was the day most typical of a New York winter, windy and pitilessly clear, and the razor coldness of it cut through the loose sashes. It was a day that normally would have invited her to seek protection from its freezing blatancy in an armchair before an open fire. But now such feline luxury would have been no haven for her, even if she had had it at hand. No, she must go out and face this day. "Bundle up well, little Helma," a remote Byzantium voice seemed saying to her, "and the fresh air will do you good." Another and mysterious voice, whose issuance she could not place, was whispering a different lure. She must get away from this labyrinth of red brick and brown stone, away and out where a mighty fabric of wrought and fibred steel hangs high in the air between two cities, above the impersonal tides that flow and reflow continually. There, buffeted by the winds she would look down, far down, on the foam-flecked blue and watch the struggle of innumerable craft as they breasted and cajoled and out-tricked the sapphire currents. She must fight her

fight with that air . . . those waters. . . Free as a bird with nothing between her and the sun. . . She . . . and the sun . . . and the water!

Helma put on her coat and gloves and a small toque that would not be a victim to the wind, and swiftly and stealthily went from the house. . . What if she hadn't eaten? She was strong, she would walk! Toward the bridge of her imagining she took a general direction, shunning surface cars and elevated alike. Already she felt the wanton smiting of the wind. Her face glowed and not with fever. When she came back, yes, then she would sing!

So on the crest of the new impulse she walked southward, breathing deeply of the wintry air, seeing nothing but the recurrent curbs and, between them, side-streets measuring off the laps. Time for her seemed to have no meaning. . . All at once she found herself face to face with City Hall Park. Where now? A dark structure, vaguely of metal, far over to the left, seemed to indicate her way. To make sure she inquired of a policeman for the Brooklyn Bridge. The blue-coat took her protectingly by the arm and pointed beyond the park.

"Is it the L station you're looking for, Miss?" he inquired, "or the trolleys?"

"Just the bridge," she answered. "I'm walking over."

Her words fell strange and tentative on her own ears; but the officer, a little to her surprise, appeared to take them at their face value.

"Then you'll go right under the L station there across the street. Look out for the trolleys and don't go up any stairs. Keep right to the middle always and walk straight ahead." He was leading her forward a few steps as he gave his instructions. "You'll find it pretty windy out there on the bridge," he added, "but I guess there's no danger of your blowing away. It's a real March day, though. I sure don't envy you the walk, lady!"

"Oh, I shall love it!" cried Helma, mustering an enthusiasm that she almost felt.

"Well, good luck to you, Miss!" said the big, kindly fellow.

Helma thanked him and went in the direction that he had pointed out. She crossed the broad roadway and the surface tracks which, turning, swept amid the pillars beneath the Elevated structure. It was all gloomy and mean, this entrance to the bridge. Once past it she should find sunlight and free air. Between gritted teeth she drew in and expelled her breath. Presently she was ascending the lane of asphalt that stretched before her to the first tower of the bridge, grey and oblong, pierced by the twin cones of its two pointed arches. Close on either side were passing the L trains in rumbling, deliberate series. The trolley lines that flanked them and the two driveways which completed the bridge's width seemed almost remote. She noted cables in long ribbons running their sagging way to the top of the tower, but yet no water was in sight. Instead she saw about her the upper stories of buildings that rose from a dingy narrowness of streets and carried signs of clothing, cigars, physics, salad dressings, chewing gum. As she reached some steps that led to the tower, she caught her first glimpse of water and piers and the wide, straggling street that fronted on them. Funnels and masts of ships rose over warehouse roofs. There was an excitement in this broadening of the prospect; she fairly bounded up the steps to the tower and around its southern end to the bridge itself.

Here she was in an airy cage of truss and cables. The narrow transverse boards of the footwalk had a springy way of bending and quivering, if never so slightly, under her feet. The trains and trolleys and the two roadways had dropped well below its arc now, but from them rose a full and constant vibratory hum. She seemed suspended on a giant swing that had come to a full stop in mid space. Other foot-passengers on the bridge were so few as not to disturb her sense of solitude. And all about her the wind frolicked crazily. But her toque was pinned securely to her hair and her coat held. On she marched in battle royal with the

air, and far below, across the ramps and cables of the bridge, the great curve of the river foamed and sparkled to the winter wind and sun.

In the midst of that suspension she stopped short. It was an unconscious impulse; she had been speeding on so boldly. But the secret forces that had drawn her there sprang from their hiding and called the halt. Through the narrow spaces between the slats of the walk she could make out the distant glitter of the water, now clean under her. Downstream, where Governors Island lay incongruous across the tide, river and bay spread like a vast enamel gleaming beneath the untempered glare of a cloudless sky. It was adamant turned quicksilver.

Could it be here, could it be here? . . . Some had. . . But how could anybody jump to that sea of hardness? . . . And from where had they done it? . . . Not from the footway certainly. . . The oxygen of this mid-air freedom, pouring in from the illimitable ocean, crammed her lungs, shooting her blood to tiniest tingling capillaries. Her eyes roved over the sovereign vista of cities and waters. Tugs, barges, freighters, ferries working in from stream to dock, were brave and rollicking in their struggle against adverse winds and tides. The universe was strong and capable and cheerful; no room in its bright panoply for gnawing worm and secret griefs. . . She raised her head, breathed deep and strong of the sea air, and again walked on.

The bridge was now in its Brooklyn segment. Before her she saw an unaccustomed city, an unaccustomed country. The winds were milder in their play. There must be sanctuary within the fold of this new land. To the right ran a street of warehouses and behind them she had a glimpse of the hanging gardens of Columbia Heights, still in their winter's brown. A land of welcoming soberness it seemed. . .

The footway, repeating conversely the rise of the other end, now descended among the elevated and trolley lines. She looked at the cars as once more they passed on her own

level. One bore the sign "Flatbush" . . . Flatbush—or was it Flatlands? . . . The big brick house . . . almost a mansion . . . the many children. . .

Like a dagger the remembrance smote her. She swayed toward the railing and put out her hand, seeking the steadiness of its stanch iron. Her buoyancy was gone . . . a collapsed toy balloon. She was cold, abysmally, eternally cold. She felt that other pedestrians were looking at her curiously. Summoning what strength she could, she mechanically continued her walk.

At length she had quitted the bridge and was standing in the low-roofed, pillared forest of the Brooklyn terminal. Here was winter in an iron oppression. Previously she had moved, if without an avowed goal, at least with impetus. That was gone. Knowing not why, nor yet why not, she kept on till she was clear of the pillars and the crushing weight of roof. A mortal weakness was spreading through her; she was afraid that she might faint. She recalled that she had not touched a morsel of food that day. Yet the mere thought of food was repugnant. . . Once more she braced herself and walked on. Whither? She was entering an undiscovered country.

A paraphernalia of car-lines, lamp-posts, hydrants, passers-by, of shops that looked too small for their windows and signs, told her nothing. She was desolately aware of her own utter strangeness and of the helplessness that may beset us all. Of a sudden her knees trembled and faintness darkened her eyes. Dimly she made out a brief legend sprawled across a window in tall white letters directly at hand: "Wilmington Lunch." She found the door and went in.

A moist and fetid smell of victuals and stale tobacco permeated the lifeless warmth within. An electric arc light shed its unnatural glow to the end of the room, falling on a counter, kitchen—she could not tell what. There were chairs, each with an arm broad like a tray, ranged against the walls. She sank into one, trembling, dizzy. A sliver of a

waiter, greasy and soiled, was bending over her in a wasp-like attention. She managed to ask for tea and a roll. The waiter whirred away. She sat there, motionless in her own darkness, conscious only of tired and sickened flesh.

The tea was hot and not too weak. She drank of it dutifully and it steadied her. She could not bring herself to touch the roll.

"Not feeling quite up to the mark, Miss?"

Helma turned with surprise in the direction of the voice. In the chair next to hers, between her and the window, sat a man who must have been young, though he hardly seemed so. He was flashily dressed, and he looked at her from a creased face with big, dissipated eyes.

"I've got something that'll make you feel better," he continued in a subdued, insinuating drawl.

She noted now with a rising terror the tough, sallow features, the striped necktie in primary colors, the harsh black and white of the checked coat. She saw the cheap sport of the theatre, the cowardly lady-killer of a hundred melodrama bill-boards, and actually she felt surprise that the type familiar in low fiction should exist recognizably in life. For an instant the image of Gonsalvo flickered in her mind. But was he any better? Full of a double loathing she drew away, but the man went on with his stealthy persuasions:

"Don't be afraid, Miss, I can see you're up against it. I'm just a friend that wants to help you along. Here, take a swig of this, and then we'll talk."

As he spoke he was extricating something from a pocket.

Just then Helma was aware of a disturbance in another part of the restaurant. Turning her head, she now distinctly saw a long counter, laden with dishes of various foods, and behind it a youth in mussy chef's clothes. But it was from one end of the counter, rigged up as a cashier's cage, that the disturbance came. A ponderous, roseate woman had got out of her chair and was wedging a way between counter and wall. Having at last effected her egress, she made straight toward Helma, scowling portentously under a wab-

bling pompadour that seemed to glitter and shake in chemical menace. With a theatrical abruptness she stopped before Helma's chair, set her hands on her hips, and looked beyond Helma with a threatening nod. Then she bent toward her and said in a voice whose kindness there was no mistaking:

"Come over here with me, young lady."

Whereupon, straightening herself again, she spoke beyond Helma in a very different tone:

"Well, have you paid your check? . . . You might as well do it now, and no monkey business. . . Here, Sam. . ."

The greasy waiter came hurrying.

The woman took Helma's hand in one of hers and guided her toward the counter. Then, pushing the last chair of a row around to face the counter, she seated Helma in it. Sentinel-like she now ranged herself before Helma, as if raking with her eyes not only the lunch-room but the street beyond.

"You'd better have another cup of tea," she said invitingly, and without waiting for a reply gave the cook an order.

"You don't look any too well, Miss," she continued in her tone of kindly confidence, "and I saw right off that fellow was annoying you. He don't come in here often. There ain't much for his kind here. If I had my way, him and all his likes'd be dumped on a mud-scow and sent out to sink. But I can't prevent him coming in as long as he behaves himself on the premises. But this time he got a pretty close call, and I guess he knows it. They're dirty cowards all of them. . . Now, here—" and she handed Helma the fresh cup of tea.

In her weakness and her gratitude, Helma did not know quite what to say, but she murmured some kind of thanks.

"Are you a stranger in Brooklyn?" the woman asked.

Helma said she was, adding that she had been out walking and had crossed the bridge from New York, when she had felt faint and so stepped in there.

"I guess you walked too far this windy day," said the woman reassuringly. "You live in New York, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Think you can get home all right alone? Because if you can't I'll send my boy along with you."

Helma said she was sure she should have no difficulty.

"If you've got the time, don't bother about the Elevated," the woman continued. "Just get a surface car here at the corner," and she named the one that Helma should take. "Feeling a little better now? Anything more you'd like to have?"

Helma, really somewhat restored, thanked her profusely and said there was not. "Only my check," she added.

"Check's paid," announced the woman with the impersonal finality of a descending blade. "Don't be afraid of that low pimp," she added confidentially. "When anybody like him speaks to you, all you've got to do is to tell him to get out of your way and hurry up about it or you'll call a cop, and, believe me, he'll run like a rabbit! Rotten cowards!" she repeated. . . "Wait," she added; "I'll tell Sam to see you on the right car; then *I* won't worry! You know how to change at the other end of the bridge, don't you?"

Helma said that she did.

The car had few occupants, and she could sink into the comfort of a corner seat and close her eyes in the temporary relief that it afforded. But within her was an inarticulate sense of defeat. At the New York end of the bridge she encountered the homing crowd of the evening rush hour. It was a jostling struggle thenceforth in street car and on pavement toward the Wilkins house. But at length she opened the door into the familiar hallway.

As it happened Mrs. Wilkins was just turning the corner of the stairs on her way to her basement territories.

"Oh, it's you, Helma; so glad to see you, dear!" she lilted with her undiscourageable pleasantness. "You're getting to be such a stranger. Coming down to dinner this evening?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Wilkins," Helma answered with a great

effort toward an equal pleasantness, "but I'm going out to dinner. Probably to-morrow night I shall be here," and she was already fleeing up the stairs from the insistent landlady with as much speed as mere civility would permit.

"You'll be very welcome, dear. We miss you when you're not with us," the other woman called as she descended in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XVII

Helma mounted the dimly lighted flights and entered the semi-darkness of her room. For a wonder the place was warm enough. She removed her hat and coat and lay down on the bed. The stimulating effect of the tea had worn off. She was tired through and through, and the incident in Brooklyn was so recent that she felt the familiarity of her bed and pillows as a caress and a relief. She turned on her side and fell asleep. . .

She awoke gradually to the stare of the vacant windows in such light as the street-lamps sent up to the fourth story. Otherwise the room was quite dark. She raised herself a little, extricated her watch, and, turning its face in the direction of the nearest window, sought out the hands. The hour-hand stood at nine and the minute-hand somewhere between the ten and the quarter after. Nine ten . . . nine fifteen. . . She was no longer sleepy at all, but she lay back again. Her eyes pried into the darkness of the room. . . Nothing. . . There was nothing there. . . Nothing anywhere. . . Nothing. . . Nothing. . .

The sense of void was maddening. She sat up now on the side of the bed, her feet on the floor. . . Still nothing. . . She stood up and took a step. Sick and faint from the effort, she sat down again, and now she clasped her hands over her face. It was all nothing. . . Her hands went limp and dropped. . . But no, this would never do! Frantically she strove to utter one singing note. She heard a raucous, pitiable gurgle. . . She sank on the pillows, her

fingers kneading her cheeks in the anguish of it. That too was gone! Everything was gone! Everything! . . . Why this to her? Oh, if she could only stop thinking! . . . But, undeterred, the spectres of the mind came crowding back—amongst them the couple in the basement restaurant. Yes, the couple! And anger, hot and trembling, surged through her body. Again she made the effort and stood up on the floor.

The room was cold now. And the fasting and the strain had taken their toll. She was weak, weak. . . Again she sat down on the edge of the bed and held her face in the cup of her hands. The hard, steady glow from the lamps in the street struck across the window-panes. That street was as silent as if it traversed a dead city. And the receding walls of thought, like a withdrawal of black ice, left her in an inexorable desertion, living. She clutched at the counterpane on either side as if she *must* hold to something. . . No, there was one other. Out of the dark immense a name emerged—Dubosc.

She got up from the bed with the directness of a headsman or a priest, and weak as she was, struggled once more into coat and hat. Then, with infinite precautions against being heard, she went out from her room and down the stairs and into the street, and as though each step were her last, she took the well-remembered way toward Dubosc's. . .

The house stood sealed in its dark row like a section of a giant sepulchre; the outside door blank and immutable as if nobody had opened it in years. Nevertheless, she dragged herself up the steps and pressed the button of the door-bell. . . Not an answering sound of any kind. . . Again she rang, and again. Her heart was throbbing with impatience and fear. Why was there no answer?

At what must have been her fifth or sixth ring, she heard at last a muffled noise from the inner door of the vestibule. She held herself expectant, planning just what she should say to the servant who habitually opened to her in the daytime. The outer door gave just a crack and dimly she saw

through it a perpendicular reduction of the face of Dubosc himself, white as a ghost's in the light reflected from the street.

"Helma!" he spoke in a half-whispered surprise.

"Yes," she answered; it was all that she could say. Even he looked cut off from her, forbidding; yet she knew it was Dubosc.

He opened the door wide enough to admit her into the vestibule and then made way for her to go on into the hall. He shut tight the outer and then the inner door. From the single low flame of gas over the newel-post, she saw that he was clad in a dark dressing-gown and that the iron grey of his thin hair was rumpled.

"I was asleep and the bell woke me up," he said. And then he looked at her.

Dim though the light was, she could discern surprise and then compassion as they overspread his features. In one stride he came to her and encircled her in his arms.

"My poor child!" he breathed.

And gently he led her through the hallway toward the rear of the house. Helma was now quivering in every nerve. She could not possibly have walked alone. She hung on Dubosc, clinging to him as to the rock of salvation.

He led her past the parlor and the studio to the extension beyond. The hall stopped at a door which opened into a brightly lighted room. The woodwork and the paper were fresh and soft in coloring. It was a man's room, as she saw from the high chest of drawers, the oval shaving-mirror, the neckties hanging over a bar, the clothing deposited on chairs and on a table. But it was spacious and well-furnished. A bed stood at right angles to the door; against one of the walls a couch. The bed had recently been occupied. Beyond it and opposite it were other doors. Dubosc walked over and opened one of them. It was a clothes-closet. From it he took a loose garment in light silk, and tossed it on the bed.

"The bathroom is over there," he said, "and here is some-

thing that will do for a night-gown. I am going into the studio to make you something hot to drink. Now undress yourself and get into bed." And Dubosc left the room shutting the door behind him.

He had spoken as a mother speaks to a tired and frightened child. It was no time to think of the character of a situation that even in her blind desperateness she knew was extraordinary. Dubosc had spoken, and his saving syllable of human comfort had found her out. She was too tired now to think more. With what of strength remained to her she obeyed Dubosc.

She had been lying in the bed for some little time when he came back carrying a cup and saucer.

"Now, *ma petite fille,*" he said, "I'll let you sip this. It's just a good *infusion de tilleul,* a night-cap for the little Helma," and he drew a chair to the bedside and fed it to her spoonful by spoonful with a care that was maternal. She thought that she detected a suspicion of rum beyond the gentle aroma of the linden blossoms. At any rate, it brought a grateful warmth to the surface of her flesh.

When Dubosc had given her the last spoonful, he got up. She closed her eyes and lay quite still. She could just hear the catlike tread of his feet on the rugs. She guessed he was making a bed for himself on the couch. Two or three times she heard him mutter half aloud, "*Sale vache espagnol!*" Then somehow Dubosc knew. That was an infinite relief—no intolerable anguish of an explanation.

A window was raised. The light ceased. She could hear Dubosc settling himself on the couch. Then he spoke in the softest of voices:

"*Ma chère petite fille,* try your best to go to sleep."

"I will," she answered even more softly.

At least the terror of her solitude was gone, and in the strange comfort of this lone man's presence she slept.

CHAPTER XVIII

She awoke to a sound of singing near at hand. She was alone in Dubosc's room. Sunlight rested bright and full upon the drawn shades of the two southern windows. A lesson was evidently going on in the studio. Under her mind's eye the past lay mirrored as if on still waters. She too was placid, cut off from the turmoil of the world and its assault upon the peace and sanctity of the human soul . . . the sanctity. . .

She had no desire to stir. Still, obedient to custom, she got up and took her bath. When that was over and she had brushed out her hair, she went back to bed, content to remain there in the shadow of the room. It was enough that the menace of life had been shut out.

At length there came a long pause in the singing. The hall door opened gingerly. She saw Dubosc enter with a little tray. He had brought her coffee and a roll.

"Now, *mon enfant*," he said in his gentle *mezzo-forte*, "you play with this for a while. I have two hours more of lessons. Then we'll have our *déjeuner*."

And softly he went out of the room, leaving her to do as she pleased with what he had brought her. She drank the coffee and nibbled at one end of the roll. Then she placed the tray on the night-table beside the bed, and, readjusting the pillows, lay down again. She was quite willing so to lie and forget.

In due course the singing once more ceased and soon Dubosc reappeared, this time with a larger tray, which he arranged on the principal table. He made several trips in and out of the room, while Helma watched him inertly. Then he moved two chairs up to the table and announced that their *déjeuner* was ready. He said little, but he insisted on her eating of the scrambled eggs and drinking a glass of the rich milk that he had provided specially for her. Luncheon over, he put the dishes back on the tray and, glancing at his watch, returned to the studio for more lessons.

Helma lay down again. In a tranquil, incurious way she wondered just what Dubosc's housekeeping might be, whether this cooking that she had tasted was his own, or whether the janitress or some other woman employed about the place had had a hand in it. Anyway, the question interested her very little and she easily drifted off into slumber.

But when, after some hours, she awoke it was as though all need of sleep had gone forever; and in the greyness of descending twilight spectres from the terror of the world outside walked again.

Presently Dubosc opened the door, tentatively, as if in fear of disturbing her. Then, with the quiet authority of a parent certain of obedience, "I want you to dress now, Helma," he said; "tea will be ready in less than an hour."

When the time came, she was dressed and sitting in a chair. But first a troubling consideration had to be dealt with.

"Mrs. Wilkins . . . How about Mrs. Wilkins? . . . She'll be worrying."

"Mrs. Wilkins is all right," replied Dubosc in his soothing evenness of voice. "You needn't think about her at all."

He made Helma drink two cups of tea, copiously provided with cream, and lured her into eating a cake.

"Now put your hat and coat on," he said, "and we'll go for a walk."

It was nearly dark outside and the air was mild and windless. He led her over to the park, and they walked on its moist paths winding in and out amongst the bare trees and shrubbery. Sometimes they crossed a broad roadway where fashionable turnouts were still passing briskly. Once they sat down for a little on a bench. The air was pleasant to breathe, and she did not mind the wraiths of men and women that they encountered in the darkness. It was a world of shadow and unreality. . . But something inescapably real was tormenting her, and in a lonely turn, by a clump of cedars, she made the effort and spoke:

"You know, I can't sing?" In the fear of her own words her voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"Of course you can't now," replied Dubosc brusquely, as if impatient of her question. "But you will."

For the moment his answer sufficed her. . .

When they returned to the house she was physically tired. Dubosc led her immediately to the bed-room.

"Rest a bit, and then you can help set the table for our dinner," he said. "I'll be back with it before long."

She did as he bade her. Soon Dubosc appeared with a well-stocked tray.

"And this isn't all, Helma." True to his word, he made two more trips to the mysterious without. At last everything was ready for them to draw up to the table. Again she found herself faintly wondering as to how much Dubosc had prepared himself.

For some time they lingered over their little dinner, and then Dubosc lighted a cigar. They had spoken only of the flavor or seasoning of this or that dish when, apropos of nothing at all, he began to recount some experiences of his first operatic tour through the French provinces, principally the *Midi*. It was amusing enough, she reflected, but of what use? Thanks to the walk, she had begun to feel drowsy, and it was with relief that she heard Dubosc say, when he had finished his cigar:

"I have some work to do in the studio, Helma. It will take me quite a while. You had better go to bed."

He gathered the dishes together on the tray and went out with it.

Before he returned Helma had fallen asleep, but with the first suspicion of dawn she was awake again. She could hear the heavy breathing of Dubosc from his couch. Then the strangeness, the grotesqueness of her situation smote upon her. Here she lay in the room with this elderly, sleeping Frenchman, her voice gone, Byzantium a thousand miles away, Mrs. Wilkins . . . Mrs. Wilkins might be fearfully anxious. . .

She raised herself sufficiently to see Dubosc. He looked older so, with his eyes tight shut, his mouth open, and his gray hair tousled. But he was her only sword and buckler against the terror of the world. She dropped back on her pillow forgetful of all else in a wave of gratitude toward Dubosc.

When she awoke next she was again alone in the room. The window shades were yellow with the morning sunshine, and a spray of swift scales rose and fell acutely from the studio. She got up and began the drawing of her bath. . .

The day passed much as the previous day had. But the placidity of Helma's inertia was disturbed by the insistent reflection that this sort of thing could not go on indefinitely.

She said so to Dubosc as he held her coat for her, prefatory to their late afternoon walk.

"Wait till we're at dinner, Helma," he replied. "I have something in mind that I will tell you then."

There was the fillip of expectancy to their stroll in the park, but dinner passed without Dubosc's coming to the suggested subject. When it was over he said that he must go into the parlor to telephone; he would be back shortly.

He was gone for what seemed an unconscionable time, but when he returned she saw from his face that now he did have something to tell her.

"To-morrow we're going to the country, Helma," he announced. "To-morrow is Saturday. I notified my pupils not to come. We shall start right after luncheon. If there's anything you need for the next few days, you can buy it in the village up there."

She was surprised herself at the relief and consolation which his words conveyed. This would be a further respite; she must not look beyond it.

CHAPTER XIX

EARLY the following afternoon they drove over through the pleasant weather to a ferry, crossed the Hudson, and on the other bank found a waiting train, and presently they were jogging along, with many stops, through towns and villages, past rivers and lakes, amongst hills and woods, toward a destination about which Helma troubled not at all. She sat beside Dubosc with the obedient docility of a tethered animal. Once in a while he mentioned a lake or a station. For the most part they did not talk.

At last Dubosc said: "The next stop is ours."

It was a village much like another, prefaced by rolling, wooded country.

On the platform a stocky, brownish man, his broad face lighted with a smile, ran up to them and seized hold of Dubosc by both hands: *"Ah! c'est vous, Monsieur Dubosc! Très heureux de vous recevoir!"* And, turning toward Helma, he lifted his hat with a murmured, *"Enchanté, Madame; mes respectueux hommages."*

In spite of Dubosc's remonstrances, the enthusiastic fellow grabbed up their luggage and made off with it to a conveyance that stood waiting in the road beside the platform.

"Who is this pleasant-looking man that seems so cordial?" Helma asked Dubosc, thinking to herself that he might be an amiable and prosperous butcher.

"He is a former chef in the big hotels," replied Dubosc. "I've known him for many years, both him and his wife. He made a neat little fortune and then decided to quit the heat of the kitchen and have a house up here in the country. It's quite a big place, in a pine grove, near a lake. During the season shooting parties come up here. In the winter they close up a part of the house, but any old friend like myself is always made welcome if he wants a few days of rest and country air. . . You think it odd that I, Dubosc, know a chef so well? *Eh bien*, my little Helma, you've still got everything to learn about the French. Real democ-

racy is not here in your land of the free and the brave."

The air was fresh and bracing, and she found Dubosc quite sparkling now with the adventure.

Presently their host signalled his readiness for them. They got into a sort of two-seated surrey with a canopy top, drawn by a pair of well-groomed bays. The luggage was stowed beside the driver under and on the front seat.

Dubosc bent forward and, still speaking in French, asked the man to stop at a shop.

"He's very proud of those bays of his," Dubosc whispered to Helma as he leaned back.

As a matter of fact, they stopped at two or three shops, and then, once out of the village, their host clicked to his horses and they trotted off at a smart pace into the country.

The house, a big, white wooden structure, stood a little back from the road amongst its pines. There were other buildings, as on a small farm. Behind them all lay the lake, like a livid mirror in the gathering dusk. They drove around to the side of the house and stopped before the door of the kitchen.

The door opened and an ample, beaming woman, whose generous brown hair parted in two broad waves above her forehead, stepped out on the little porch to greet them.

"Ah, Monsieur Dubosc!" she called, with unmistakable pleasure in her tones.

Two boys of nine or ten ran out after their mother and scampered back into the kitchen with the various packages. Dubosc got down and assisted Helma to alight. At the door he introduced the women:

"*Madame Ortobeig, j'ai l'honneur de vous présenter ma femme.*"

Before Helma had had time to reflect on this way of putting it, Ortobeig came bustling in after them. He despatched the boys to take the rig to the stable. Nothing would satisfy him but to make a hot grog right off for the whole party.

"That will be good for us after our ride," he said to

Helma, and his black eyes snapped with anticipatory relish.

The kitchen was spacious and clean, warm and cheery. The men swallowed their grog with much smacking of lips. Madame drank hers while she hovered over the range. Dinner would be ready within an hour. But first she must take Monsieur and Madame to their rooms.

These were on the floor above, a big corner room, simply but sufficiently furnished, with windows on either side, and a small room opening out of it.

When Madame Ortobeig had switched on the light, she went over to the fireplace and struck a match. She had laid the fire, she explained, because their furnace was small and without a fire the big room might be chilly. And then, turning to leave her guests, she added:

"It's a great pleasure for me to see you here. You know, Madame, he is a vairy old friend of us, your husband."

The unwonted word startled Helma, but she realized instantly that it covered a definite point in diplomacy. If it did jostle one of those jutting remainders of Byzantium, in another sense it explicitly established her status and so should put her absolutely at her ease.

But Dubosc had his word to pronounce. When they were alone, he said: "Perhaps I ought to have warned you about this little matrimonial fiction, but really it had escaped my mind. You see, it's a minor point of propriety that means a lot to French people like our hosts and has no other significance whatsoever."

After an abundant dinner, Helma and the two men sat around the table over coffee and liqueurs. It was warm in the diningroom and the men had taken off their coats. Madame Ortobeig and the boys busied themselves with clearing away the remnants of the repast. Helma offered to help them, but Madame, with her big, cheery smile, waved her away. "Another day, yes, with pleasure. But this is your first evening here, and we must celebrate it."

The men were talking of business, politics, world relations, as they puffed away at excellent cigars. They spoke in

English that easily slipped over into French and back again. It was a new experience to Helma to find a singing teacher and an ex-chef discussing affairs of state like cabinet ministers. It gave her her first insight into some of the limitations of ordinary American masculinity persistently preoccupied with the obvious and trivial aspects of the life of their immediate and trivial world. When Madame Ortobeig had finished with the dishes, she got out some sewing. The boys then kissed their parents goodnight, shook hands with Helma and Dubosc, and ran off to bed. In this bright, homesome place tragic thinking slunk off into the shadows.

The Sunday was a rural holiday. They slept late, Helma in the big corner room, Dubosc in the small room adjoining, whose door he left open. Madame Ortobeig herself brought up their *petit déjeuner*. In the morning Dubosc took Helma for a long walk. In the afternoon Ortobeig harnessed his two fine bays, and drove his guests through the rolling country, which had not yet been awakened by the spring. Both the midday and the evening meals were of festive proportions.

When they were going to bed that night Dubosc said to her:

"To-morrow I must go to town, Helma. It would be more convenient for me not to come back here till Wednesday evening. But if you should need me at any moment, ring up my studio and I will come out at once."

In spite of this assurance, his words had evoked on the instant the spectres of the last days. She slept fitfully and the wind that soughed in the pine trees and caused a slight rattling of the shutters and the sashes seemed the dank wind of the country of the dead. But she had made up her mind that not by word or look should she detain Dubosc. If not to-day, some other day she must learn again to be alone.

Madame Ortobeig, as a matter of fact, made it very easy for her. Never an indicative word did she speak, but behind the tact of the hostess Helma divined understanding and sympathy. She assisted in some of the lighter work of

the kitchen and begged to share the sewing. The boys being at school and Ortobeig busy about the place left the two women much alone together. Without appearing to give anything resembling a lesson, Madame Ortobeig encouraged Helma to speak French with her. Thus her considerateness and good sense helped the days to pass. Then, besides, Dubosc telephoned each evening, and that helped more.

✦ ✦ ✦

WEDNESDAY was a particularly fine day. At luncheon Ortobeig asked Helma and his wife to join him in a drive. They would start a little after three and on their way back would pick up Monsieur Dubosc at the station. But lovely as the country was that mild afternoon, even in its wintry left-over of grays and browns, Helma felt a growing perturbation as they drove. Though she had been longing for the return of Dubosc as a young child longs for its mother, she now felt acutely that it would solve nothing—a mere postponement . . . from what to what? For of one thing doubt was impossible: the present device of living could not go on much longer. And the untold menace of the future lay like lead wherever she looked upon that happy prospect of hills and hollows, big with the promise of the spring.

But there was something about Dubosc, his alert air, his buoyant step, as he crossed the station platform, that cut like a streak of scarlet through her thoughts. Madame Ortobeig had moved to the front seat next her husband. Dubosc climbed in beside Helma. He kissed her lightly and then, "I have great news for my little Helma," he whispered, "but not a word until bedtime."

"Great news!" What could be great news for her now? . . . But Dubosc was a necromancer—had been, would always be! . . . It *was* to be great news—it *had* to be! She forced herself to a belief. Instantly his words became a touch of flame. The reaction, the strained joy were all but hysterical. She knew the supreme pleasure of release from pain. She would not part with it; she hugged it; she

dandled it. "But not a word until bedtime!" And lest something should tempt Dubosc to an immature confidence —the certainty that might chill or even kill—she carefully refrained from going upstairs with him before dinner. On no account must they be alone together! She absolutely insisted on laying the table for Madame Ortobeig and helping in the kitchen, where now her presence was accepted. Her gaiety grew positively infectious. Madame Ortobeig, far too wise, made no comments, but a deep laughter in her eyes was the record of her quick observation.

The dinner was jubilant. Dubosc and Ortobeig outdid themselves in the merriment of their give and take. Helma was absolutely feverish in her soaring spirits. It was not until after midnight that the lights downstairs were put out and they all went up to bed.

When at last Helma found herself alone with Dubosc, doubt seized her. She was possessed with the fear of what she might not guess. Suppose this were none of the unnamed magical solution whose certainty she had assumed . . . ? From the tangle of circumstance was there only one way out?

Dubosc cut her torment short. He had turned the light on and moved from window to window pulling down shades. Now he wheeled around to face Helma, tugging the while impatiently at his tie. Twenty years might have fallen from him; his look was radiant, young.

"Helma," he said, while she stood breathless in suspense, "we sail for Paris on Saturday, you and I."

So that was it! She crumpled down on her bed, not fainting, but in a kind of daze. She recognized the way out; yet after all that had happened she was lifeless before the revelation.

Dubosc knelt beside her; he put his arms around her and very gently drew her to him and kissed her forehead.

"*Mon enfant*, but aren't you *glad?*"

She nestled in the protection of his arms like a child in its mother's breast.

"It's my voice," she whispered, but the whisper was a cry. "Will it ever. . . ? Can I ever. . . ?"

"Leave that to me!" Dubosc spoke aloud and with an authority almost magisterial.

"But I can't sing a note," she insisted. "I tried again today."

"Leave—that—to—me!" The slow, persuaded emphasis of his words struck like the report of cannonading.

"My clothes and music at Mrs. Wilkins's. . ."

"Miss Brockway and I have attended to all that. Friday evening we shall return to town and go immediately aboard the steamer. Everything is taken care of. You needn't think about anything."

She lay there in still wonderment at this man who had divined all and left nothing undone. She loved him as a child its parent; not as a woman her man. And *he* had found her the way of release out of the unbearable city.

BOOK III — RAYMOND

CHAPTER I

PARIS they found at that delicious moment of the early spring when the moist air has lost its wintry chill and the trees of boulevard and *quai* are feathery with bursting leaves. The streets and the river, as it divides the city in its generous curve, were pulsing with a new gift of life. The earth had wakened from its long slumber, and a breeze-blown sport of sun and clouds, tossing a dappled light in sudden patterns everywhere, betrayed the growing strength of the young year.

The ocean-crossing had been stormy, and its engrossing discomforts, for once, brought mercy by sparing Helma much remembrance and reflection. Now the pleasant strangeness and the unwonted beauty of her new environment, and a fleet vernal gaiety that was gone before it hurt, could not but exert a measure of healing power.

For the first few days they stopped at a small French hotel on the Left Bank (Helma had not dreamed of the existence of such a place) which had been known to Dubosc in the past, and their time was shared between some unostentatious sight-seeing, in which she found him the most amiable and distinguished of cicerones, fluent with history and personal reminiscence, and the less agreeable occupation of studio-hunting.

Dubosc still had many *relations* in Paris, and through one such he found an *atelier* that met his needs very well. The vast and lofty room, with its minor cluster of bed-room,

dressing-room, and, of course, kitchen, occupied half of the top-floor in a cloistered little street on the edges of the Faubourg St. Germain. The painter whom it habitually housed was absent for a time from Paris and only too glad to rent it furnished to a suitable tenant. Besides the big slanting skylight, there were two tall windows looking southward over a vine-hung courtyard toward an indefinite array of roofs and chimney-pots beyond. Within and without it was all as quiet as if it were itself a picture. Could the painter, Helma thought, have beheld the courtly Dubosc in its setting of remoteness and tranquillity and a sort of miscellaneous and tarnished richness, his practised eye would immediately have recognized his ideal tenant, of a "suitability" impossible to surpass.

For Helma, Dubosc obtained a pleasant room with a family living on a lower floor of the same building. There she would also have her *petit déjeuner*. The other meals would be taken in the studio (Dubosc had inherited from the painter a capable *femme de ménage*) or else *en ville*. Having thus arranged the matter of living and sketched out plans for his teaching, Dubosc was ready to begin the campaign for Helma's future.

This opened with his calling on innumerable acquaintances—musicians, agents, managers, important journalists, former colleagues, members of the American colony, anybody that he thought might aid in any way. The fame of Dubosc was still green, and word spread quickly that he had returned to Paris for a time and would accept pupils—in "strictly limited" number, of course. And with amazing speed the hours he could devote to teaching others than Helma were booked up. At the same time the report circulated with equal rapidity that Dubosc had brought with him from New York *une jeune Américaine* fortunate enough to be endowed with "*the* soprano voice of the century." That phrase, Helma was given to understand, meant far more than words idly repeated, for Dubosc was known as a man who never boasted of talent where talent did not reside.

When it was voice that Dubosc talked many took his word as holy writ.

The problem of Helma—and no one better than Dubosc could appreciate its delicacy and difficulty—he set out to solve through the ancient remedy of work, trusting to the unaccustomed charm of novel surroundings to help him in his task. The voice he spared as much as he could, never forcing the reluctant throat, and having started a *cours* with the pupils whom he had accepted, he went on training Helma in action and repertory in the cheery company of the other students. Furthermore, he found an elderly French woman, as he had in New York, to give her daily lessons in the language and diction, and he had the satisfaction of watching the book French that she had brought with her from America turn rapidly into living speech.

Among other *jeunes Américaines* at the *cours* were two Runnells sisters, wholesome, breezy westerners from a suburb of Chicago, who with their mother had an apartment near the *Étoile*. They immediately took a great fancy to Helma and showered her with invitations. A convenient cousin of theirs, had, moreover, settled at Moret for the summer, and from time to time an excursion out to his villa, with Fontainebleau and its forest close at hand, showed Helma the divine French countryside and the quaint and diverting life of its countless villages.

Though Dubosc approved this friendship with the Runnellses, he encouraged no others. Occasionally there was luncheon or dinner in company with important *relations*, and almost daily Dubosc had people in to tea, but he saw to it that Helma should not be over-stimulated or overworked. The most expert trainer of a blooded race horse could not have been more discerning and careful with his charge; no mother could have been more tender. And, thanks to a perfect tact, Dubosc never made his solicitude intrusive or oppressive. Helma, apart from the easy routine of her studies, remained free to do very much as she pleased, but her "pleasures" never led her far from the studio alone or

into any venturesome expeditions. She had little curiosity about the theatres, still less about the "night life" of Montmartre. To the *Comédie Française* she did go once or twice a week, because her French teacher admonished her that no better opportunity existed for hearing French spoken correctly and profiting by the example. Dubosc insisted on some opera performances, always under his escort, and subject, as in New York, to his explanations, reservations, and advice.

So with a certain ease the weeks slipped by and spring deepened into summer. Helma, if not happy, was comfortable, with a sort of unthinking, vegetable comfort. She had not dreamed a human being could be so considerate of others as Dubosc. He lavished on her the treasure of his experience and knowledge and in return asked only obedience. To her he was something of a god, but half-consciously she guessed that beyond all his tenderness lay the pride and the hope of the connoisseur, the expert, in the talent he was fostering with such infinite care. Once, in a sharp recurrence of doubt, she asked him again of the voice, if he still could believe.

"*Tais-toi*, Helma," was his reply, with just the suspicion of a menace in the blandness of his tone. "You've heard before that Dubosc does not waste his time. . ."

CHAPTER II

It was a morning in late June, one of those flawless mornings whose secret only Paris holds, when the flaming sword of summer still is sheathed in a vernal coolness; when the cloudless, clarion heavens call to youth and to the strength of youth. All life on such days is resurgent; even Helma's pulses felt the quickening. She had been on an early errand to the Galéries Lafayette, and as she stood at the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann, Paris and the morning caught

her in their irresistible current. The lassitude seemed lifted from her body, her limbs were light and resilient; she craved movement. Out of the universal brightness came the thought that this dazzling day she might climb away up to the very top of Montmartre, and like that wonderful new Louise look down on the power and splendor of the great city unfolded beneath and about her. She started.

Along the Chaussée d'Antin she eagerly picked her way among the crowds of shoppers; she safely dodged the charging vehicles in the rue St. Lazare and reached the green refuge of the square before the pompous fabric of the Trinité; she entered the rue de Clichy, and here began the real climb. By the time she had crossed the Boulevards Extérieurs and gained the sidewalk of the Avenue de Clichy, with the steeps of Montmartre still to scale, the onslaught of energy was over. After all, it was many weeks since Helma had dreamed of such an effort, and she realized that already her body was tired with the exertion. The wide and hospitable *terrasse* of the big café on the left looked singularly inviting, so down she sat at one of the little round tables, ordered a *citron pressé*, and rested her gaze on the array of push-cart folk just beyond the curb, chattering, bargaining, bickering with their customers and among themselves, while the sunlight through the interlacing branches of the trees fell upon them all in ever-shifting arabesques.

Suddenly, though the condition had existed ever since she had sat down, there flashed on the receptive screen of her mind the consciousness that she was not alone on her side of the *terrasse*. Two tables away sat the other occupant. He was obviously in the earliest twenties, and, though he was sitting quite still, he seemed all alive with the pushing vibrancy of a sturdy growing plant. Instantly her mind recorded the generous wave of brown hair that flowed back from the broad, low forehead; the aquiline purity of the long nose; the vivid glance of a pair of dark, mobile eyes; a wide, bow-shaped mouth; skin aglow as with cream and claret. The muscular vigor of his slender torso, only half

veiled by the summer brightness of its clothing, stood out like a challenge. He had crossed his legs nonchalantly, and one arm trailed along the back of the chair next his, on which his straw hat was lying. Young as he was, there was no mistaking his at-homeness in this world of Paris. Her taking stock of him must have lasted longer and more imperatively than she realized, for suddenly the youth recalled his eyes from nowhere, looked at her fixedly, started forward a little, hesitated, and then, as if backing impulse with resolution, half rose from his chair, and, his eyes twinkling mischievously, softly inquired if mademoiselle would do him the pleasure to drink something with him.

The situation was familiar enough to Helma through reading and hearsay, but previously she had not been a participant. It seemed at once so unreal and so inevitable that with a mechanical docility she assented. The youth, taking up his hat, moved to the chair beside hers.

"What will you have?" he continued as the waiter stepped up.

Another *citron pressé* was her order, and her way of saying it gave her neighbor light.

"I think you are a meess," he remarked, with a questioning smile that revealed his young and glistening teeth.

She replied that she was an American.

"Ah, it's that," was his comment. And he told her he had seen many of her compatriots at Biarritz and some of them had a *très grand chic*.

So the sluice-gates of talk opened. It developed that the young man came from Biarritz where his father directed the local newspaper and at the same time maintained a travel bureau. He admitted to a restless disposition; he had left the regiment only recently and did not get along any too well at home. It was the stepmother, perhaps, though she certainly tried to be very kind, and he loved his half-brother of five years much more than the full brother who was his elder. He had played baccarat at the Casino (incidentally, he put in, he did not on general principles approve of gam-

bling) and had cleaned up over five thousand francs. So he decided to spend some of it in Paris, where he had been just two days. . . And what was she doing in Paris?

She told him she was studying singing. Ah, he had heard much of the species, and he knew all about prima donnas! The best of them came down to Biarritz for the concerts in the grand season. Indeed, he had met and talked with several in the travel bureau, which he had more or less conducted since his return from the regiment. The prima donna was no new animal to him! He had no doubt mademoiselle would become a very great one.

Mademoiselle modestly admitted she was not so sure; at least she hoped greatly.

Meanwhile she had to recall the passing of time. Clearly this morning she was not going to the top of Montmartre, and thoughts of Dubosc and the luncheon hour put in their disconcerting claims. Still, there was some regret in her tone when she informed the young man that she must be going home, prudently reserving the information as to where "home" might be found. Half-expressed in her brain hovered the reflection that this interview had been singularly innocent—the contrary of the stock novelist's chance meeting at a Paris café. By not so much as the inflection of a word or the droop of an eyelid had her companion taken anything approaching a liberty with her after the boldness of his first question.

Helma signalled a *fiacre,* and as she rose to go, he said to her with a little richer glow to his cheeks and a very taking hesitation in his voice:

"Can't we see each other again? You know it's a bit lonely in Paris for anybody that's been here only two days."

"Perhaps we might," smiled Helma.

"Could you meet me here again?" he asked; "Monday, at the same time, about eleven?"

She ran through her mental calendar. Monday wouldn't do, but she did name a day and hour when she could be there. He took a leather case from an inside pocket of his coat and

from the case a card. Then he fumbled in a waistcoat pocket for a pencil. Resting the card on the table he scrawled something on it and handed it to Helma.

"*Pas de lapin,*" he admonished as he helped her into the *fiacre*.

She had not yet learned that phrase which many strangers in France learn with more of tears than of laughter.

The boy explained, and lightly she reassured him. As she drove down the hill she looked at the card he had given her. "Raymond Retz—Biarritz" were the words engraved upon it. In pencil the owner of the name had scrawled the day and the hour of their *rendez-vous*. While the *fiacre* rattled through the *centre* of Paris and over the Seine toward the quiet street on the fringes of the Faubourg St. Germain, its occupant had only pleasant thoughts of this chance talk. Something about the bright eagerness and the morning freshness of the youth struck a vibrant chord within her. Helma knew she must be older than he. Perhaps the latent maternal in every woman uttered a quiet word.

CHAPTER III

The next meeting passed off much like the other—the boy had many little things to tell her:—and so also the next. It was at their fourth *rendez-vous* that for the first time he suggested a walk. This might have proved awkward, for the meetings were a secret diversion on Helma's part and above all things she did not want to be seen in company with her new friend by Dubosc, or by anyone who might recognize her and carry news of her adventure to Dubosc. Not that in one way she cared. Nothing could be more innocent than this acquaintance. But how explain it? Still, she did not definitely refuse, but let Raymond stroll along with her as far as one of the wide *terrasses* on the Carrefour Châteaudun. That she set as the limit for the indiscretion, but willingly accepted the *café crême* which he proposed before they parted. The carrefour was aroar with traffic; on the *ter-*

rasse waiters and customers were outshouting one another; Helma and her escort had to raise their voices to make themselves heard at all. She was ill at ease and divined that he was. Through the racket he was informing her that he "had taken a *place*" for a time, but he offered no details. She inferred that the work could not be much of a drain on his leisure, he seemed so free to come and go as he pleased. Really she couldn't see why he mentioned it at all.

Abruptly he burst out: "You don't know how tired I'm getting of the city. I really believe if it weren't for you I'd be back in Biarritz now. What do you say if we went to the country one day—to-morrow, perhaps? Not very far, you know. Just out to Joinville-le-Pont. Somewhere where we could have luncheon out-of-doors in a garden. Then we could walk across the Bois de Vincennes and take the tram back to Paris. What do you say? . . . Can you? Will you?"

His impetuosity swept down upon her like an ominous wind. A pleasant diversion, with the added tang of secrecy, had suddenly grown serious as a thunder cloud. Must love or its greedy counterfeit always intrude? . . . She tried to tell herself he was a French boy and the French were different (she couldn't have said how) about these things. It was in vain. The noise and dust and jostling of the carrefour had turned positively sickening. Doubtless her dismay showed in her face.

"Oh, I see you don't want to. Maybe I've presumed." He spoke with a bitterness that made her look at him sharply. "It's all a mistake. It's no use. I'll leave my job and go back to Biarritz. The parents will certainly be glad to see me—"

"Be quiet, Raymond!" she interrupted him. For the second time in her life, and to her amazement, the bottom seemed to be dropping out of things, and the astounding part of it was she hadn't suspected that the situation really meant anything at all. Life *had* stolen a march on her, though the idea that she, Helma Seymour, might actually have "fallen

in love" with this lad she rejected as almost grotesque. "Be quiet, Raymond!" In this emergency his Christian name came to her as the most natural thing in the world. "Of course I should like to go for the luncheon in the country. I can arrange it perfectly for to-morrow. Where and when shall we meet?"

A childlike joy overspread Raymond's face; she half expected him to jump up into the air and shout. He didn't do that, but he answered her with gleeful alacrity, naming the Canon de la Bastille and eleven as the hour.

"But now I must go home," she said. "Stop a *fiacre* for me, please." As he lifted her in he slyly whispered the final injunction of their first parting: "*pas de lapin, tu sais!*" She remembered that he had not "tutoyéd" her before.

The drive back toward the Faubourg was made in some perturbation. It was as if the ice which for so long had locked her spirit and her voice were breaking up, and she had pain and misgiving of the change.

Dubosc had invited people in to tea that afternoon, among them an impresario who, the master had recently assured her, might some day prove useful. She saw a portly, middle-aged Frenchman, gazing shrewdly through his *pince-nez*, worn at an aggressive angle, with otherwise the general air of a complacent and settled *bourgeois*. And then, for the first time since they had been in Paris, Dubosc asked her to sing for his guests. She would rather have done anything else in the world, but none the less sing she did, and, she was certain, badly.

Dubosc, however, seemed by no means displeased. There was a courtly lift to his eyebrows and a revealing flash in his smile as he half whispered, "*Tous mes remerciments, mademoiselle!*" The impresario overflowed with compliments that might, or might not, mean everything. The other guests echoed him eagerly. Evidently she had mustered some sort of voice.

After the sedative of a night's sleep, with the outward self-possession that was now usually hers, she faced Raymond

waiting for her on the *terrasse* of the Canon. He, for his part, seemed nervous, bursting with animation. Over to the Gare de Vincennes he marched her swiftly and into a third-class carriage—on that she insisted. They had a compartment to themselves and Raymond, joyous as a truant schoolboy, profited by their privacy to relieve the little run out to Joinville with all sorts of drolleries. Once in the village street they were not long in discovering among the villas nestling behind their dooryards, across the roadway from the Marne, just the restaurant with a garden that they desired. Into it they walked gaily and took the table of their choice—no other competitors happened to be there to dispute possession with them.

The garden was spacious and well-shaded. The suburban inn gave widely on its gravelled floor through open doors and windows. Tables were scattered among the trees, and against one boundary wall stood an elderly upright piano. The place was persuasively hospitable. An obliging, if untidy, waiter brought them their *apéritifs* and paused to take the order for the luncheon. Raymond commanded generously. It was to be a feast; they should sit long at table; the bottle of wine must be a good one. The waiter fell in amicably with their plans. Standing in the doorway, the *patron* waved his well-nourished approval and sent the *garçon* back to say that he would himself pick out a wine to go with the roast and salad. Youth and a holiday were working their inveterate magic, and the flickering shadows of the trees splintered the sunshine on the gravelly expanse into a thousand flakes of gold.

"I think the *patron* must be a *Toulousain*," Raymond told Helma. "They're just like that in Toulouse; take you right into the family. When we taste the food we'll know for sure. They have a *cuisine* quite their own, and it's wonderful."

"But I shouldn't like a *cassoulet*," objected Helma.

"What, you don't like *le cassoulet?*" exclaimed Raymond in surprise. "I think you've never tasted a good one."

"But they're so heavy for luncheon."

"Maybe that's right," Raymond admitted. "Well, anyhow, we'll have something else. There's lots of variety to their *cuisine*." . .

The feast had been right royal and they were sipping their coffee in leisurely fashion from tall glasses when Raymond had an inspiration. Jumping up with a little shout he ran over to the piano, bestrode the rickety stool, and striking vigorously the broken, discolored keys, trolled out a cabaret song. It was a wreck of a piano, soured with abuse and neglect, but who minded that? The boy had a fresh, lusty baritone, and he hurled it forth with youthful gusto.

"I never suspected you had such a good voice!" Helma called over to him. "One would say you ought to be the opera singer, not I."

He turned around on the stool, looking a trifle sheepish.

"Oh, no! It's not such a good voice," he answered modestly. "But, do you know, I've never heard *you* sing? Come over here, mademoiselle; now it's up to you to show what *you* can do; let's hear that famous warble."

The waiter had paused outside the kitchen door. The *patron,* now at his ease in shirt sleeves, was standing just within. A dark, strapping woman, doubtless the *patronne,* took possession of the nearest window. So there was at least an audience for the try-out. Helma romped over to the piano, bumped down on the stool, and ran her fingers the length of the keyboard. It was of no use. The thing was too decrepit and out of tune. She quit the derelict contrivance and stood boldly up, facing her little world with a mock bow. A sudden tide of life surged to the tips of her fingers and the roots of her hair. With a propulsive force that she could not have resisted if she would, she burst into song. It was the entrance from the third act of "Manon" which leapt to her lips—that sparkling page of feminine vanity where the fragile heroine, tricked out in all her splendor as a *grande cocotte,* vaunts her prowess amid the glitter and gaiety of the Cours-la-Reine:

Je marche sur tous les chemins
Aussi bien qu'une souveraine;
On s'incline, on baise ma main,
Car par la beauté je suis reine!

In spite of the big luncheon the voice was there. The first G natural rang out with the clear, high resonance of a golden hammer blow. G sharp, B natural followed in bell-like purity.

Mes chevaux courent à grands pas,
Devant ma vie aventureuse
Les grands s'avancent, chapeau bas,
Je suis belle, je suis heureuse!

Each cadenza she managed with a regal ease.

. . . Et, si Manon devait jamais mourir,
Ce serait, mes amis, dans un éclat de rire!

She swept the final volley of laughter to a top staccato E. A crescendo trill on F sharp, beginning dim and far away, swelled like sunlight shot vibrant through a mist, and then a long-held D in alt, firm as a rock and bright as a tongue of flame. It was the old voice, the Helma voice, the voice that had dazzled and entranced Dubosc, and Helma felt the burning truth of it in the secret recesses of her being. She was herself again. At last she could sing!

Hardly knowing what she did in the contradictory abundance of her knowledge, she sang on and on. She abandoned "Manon," fell into snatches of other things, filled in, improvised, tried feats of daring; she was a swimmer diving disdainfully into cool, green combers, grasping at the spray of them, certain of her stroke, floating on long currents of legato, driving the declamation home like one even overhand after the other, rushing to spurts of bravura as if surmounting an eiger, rejoicing, glorying in her youth and

strength and inexhaustibility, and all this on top of the biggest sort of *toulousain* luncheon!

"*Je marche sur tous les chemins*" . . .

She swung back to the beginning again and ended it all with the victorious high D.

The *toulousain* couple noisily voiced their approval from the inn door. The waiter looked as if he had been vouchsafed more than Moses saw on Zion. But Raymond seemed abashed. "I hadn't the least idea it was like that," he said.

He called for the *addition* and paid it, but only after the insistent *patron* had forced on them a round of *fines* at his own expense. The adieux were elaborate, as befitted an occasion so momentous in the restaurant life of Joinville-le-Pont. At last the pair walked out of the inn-yard together in silence. Helma was too filled with the internal rapture of the conscious recovery of her vocal powers to pay much attention to her escort. Dubosc was right. He had not wasted his time; nor had she hers. After long months she was herself, her free, buoyant, abounding self again—she, Helma Seymour. Once or twice as they traversed afoot the Bois de Vincennes she vaguely heard Raymond murmur as if in a dream: "I hadn't the least idea it was like that."

At Vincennes there was the Paris tram to carry them back to the Place de la Nation, but before taking it Raymond led her over to the *terrasse* of a neighboring café for another cup of coffee. There was a new and singular note of shyness in the boy's solicitous courtesy, in his silent care of her comfort. It was as if the voice floated ever between him and her, an intangible golden obstacle. She found herself saying to him: "What a beautiful day we have had out here! We must have another soon."

His face lighted up instantly: gladness of her words glistened in his eyes.

At the Place de la Nation their ways separated. She put her hand in his in token of *au revoir*, but he hesitated, waited, looked away, and did not speak.

"What do you say about next Wednesday afternoon?" she

asked him very softly, "at three in the Avenue de Clichy?" This time the initiative was hers.

"*Mais oui,*" he responded simply.

They parted, neither one adding a *pas de lapin.*

CHAPTER IV

Wednesday fell in that week whose Saturday was the holiday of the Assumption. There was always, Helma had heard, an exodus from Paris for the great French *fête* of the late summer, and this year the dog-days singled out the beginning of the week for their most canine attack. The sun advanced through the heavens in a cloudless sky, and prone before it lay the gasping city, rancid, putrefying, under the furious bombardment of its rays. Everybody was exasperated, on edge. Even night brought scant relief. In vain one postponed dinner and finally ate it out in the torrid publicity of a sidewalk restaurant. The pavements, the walls, the very trees gave back relentlessly the heat they had gathered during the daytime. And midnight, windless and humid, ushered in wee, small hours of stagnant air and stifling warmth that held no rest for dragged-out bodies and raw nerves. It was very exceptional weather, the resigned Parisians mildly stated the case, but there it was, and nobody could offer any other solution than to get out of Paris.

Dubosc had an invitation to go with some people to Normandy, Thursday to Tuesday, for the "long week-end." Though that meant his first separation of more than a few hours from Helma since their leaving New York, she noticed that he accepted as a matter of course. The Runnellses, already down at Moret with their cousin, wrote asking Helma if she would join their house-party for a few days. Purposely she put off answering. . .

The afternoon at Joinville-le-Pont had been decisive. Subject to such modification as human circumstances inevitably impose, Helma since that luncheon in the garden

had been her old self again. Outwardly there was nothing to mark the change. No one divined it, save perhaps Dubosc—Dubosc, whose clairvoyance was that of a mother, might possibly suspect. At any rate, he was once more exercising her voice to the full, and one day at tea he spoke openly and as a matter of course of his approaching return to America, in which there was no hint of including her, and Helma heard him say it without a qualm or a quiver. For now the stream of life had taken possession of her again and of her destiny. There were deeper matters that she half glimpsed, half knew. Not that anyone could question for an instant her affection for Dubosc, her loyalty toward her master, toward the man who had actually saved her. But in the pattern of her life had he not already served his purpose, played his part? . . .

The step might have been perilous, yet she had taken it. Youth and life now reasserted their inexorable demand. It must be on to the next. Instinctively she knew that Dubosc understood too, and felt no regret. So for the Assumption he was going with his friends to Normandy. And still she avoided replying to her friends at Moret. Life must answer. . . Without explanation or excuse she set out alone to shop in the heat of the early Wednesday afternoon. And the "shopping" found her at three on the familiar *terrasse* of the Avenue de Clichy.

How different the *terrasse* was now from the haven that had harbored her exhausted body that spring morning of her first visit! The August trees, Paris-like, were brown and burned, and their stray leaves, fallen from baring branches, added to the untidiness of the sidewalk. A tired and raucous cry seemed to rise from the toiling streets—the women all turned slatterns in the heat, the men crabbed, sodden. Truly the human animal and his habitations were a rank advertisement of failure, a shameless invitation to the next breed, be it horses, be it asses, to come on quickly and do its best or worst. Even Raymond, usually so trim of body and dress, looked a little wilted as apologetically he stepped

up a good ten minutes late, he who habitually was there waiting when she arrived.

Without consulting her pleasure he called sharply to the *garçon* to bring them *bocks*, and then, complaining that the beer was warm, sent the fellow back for others. He fanned himself with his hat and spoke of the heat as insupportable. Biarritz was in the south, but it wasn't like this. *Oh, ma foi, non!* In Bordeaux they had this heavy weather. Not in his city on the sea. Paris was too far from the sea. How nice if they could run down to a beach and have a dip. But it took so long, and the crowded train. . . *Ma foi*, you might have to stand all the way to Dieppe or Fécamp! And that was out of the question.

On he rattled recklessly. Somehow Helma knew where it was all leading. But she was passive, quite; she offered nothing beyond an occasional monosyllable of attention and assent. He disposed of his first *bock* and ordered a second, with the injunction that the waiter be sure he bring it cold. That he guzzled hurriedly and ordered a third.

Of the third he partook more slowly. He became calmer, less irritable, his smile beamed out again; he was like the Raymond of the luncheon at Joinville-le-Pont. Helma sat there composed, waiting. It was all on the knees of the gods, and above the sweltering city the gods were perhaps not frowning.

"The sea is far away," Raymond was saying again, "and the holiday trains really are dreadfully crowded. . . Joinville-le-Pont is perhaps too near. . . But at least the country is preferable to Paris. . . Suppose we go, you and I, to Barbizon. . . You may have been there; it's in the Forest of Fontainebleau. They say it's very *gentil*, and it's certainly tranquil." She heard him in perfect composure, almost as in a dream. "We can go down Saturday morning and stay till Monday morning." The boy spoke on courageously, unfalteringly, as if there were nothing extraordinary in what he was proposing. And only then did he hesitate a moment, as if, in the language of high diplomacy,

he were seeking the right formula. He had it! "Shall you be free?" he asked.

"I shall be free." It seemed to her she answered him so low that she couldn't be sure he heard. . . But he did.

His only gesture was to turn away and order the waiter to bring them two more *bocks*, *"mais bien froids cette fois-ci"* . . . The flood of life seemed broad and peaceable to Helma. She rested on it like a tired child; doubtless she lowered her eyelids. She was aware of a hand laid on her own. She looked up into Raymond's eyes. *"Allons, donc!* Don't go to sleep!" he smiled back at her. *"A notre bonne promenade à la campagne!"*

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Early Saturday morning, satchel in hand, she met him at the appointed spot opposite the Gare de Lyon. Raymond was in holiday attire. Wonder of wonders for a Frenchman, he had shed his waistcoat and was sporting the broad substitute belt with its buckles and pockets which always seemed ambitious to be a waistcoat itself. There were any number of people taking the same train and Raymond insisted on first class, *aller-retour*, for Melun. "We must have seats," he said. They had them, but the train was too crowded and warm to permit the easy jollity that had marked their little run out to Joinville. At Melun they were obliged to wait a while for the steam-tram that should slowly jolt them across the fields to the shelter of the forest. But already the relief of the country was in the air as they took their second coffee on the *terrasse* beside the stopping-place of the tram.

When at length that ambling conveyance had set them down at the end of Barbizon's winding single street, with the forest towering directly before them, Raymond, taking both their satchels in one hand, and grasping her arm authoritatively with the other, directed their way at once to the Hôtel de l'Exposition, to be met at the door with a polite but firm negative. No, the hotel was full. "I took the

precaution to wire to two hotels," Raymond told her. And farther up the street they met with a cordial "Yes" at the Boule d'Or.

But the expansive landlady tempered their reception with the information that Monsieur and Madame would have to be satisfied with a room in one of the little houses on the other side of the street that served as overflow for the hotel. At holiday-time everything was full. But they wouldn't have to go over there until they were ready to go to bed. They could leave their satchels here with her in the office. As for washing up, the lavatories were directly across the garden. Now it was nearly time for luncheon. They could wash up and drink their *apéritif* right there. Or perhaps they would like a little walk first. Not into the forest. That would be for after luncheon. Oh, there were so many people here for the holiday! Falling on a Saturday like that, it made two days. Of course it was good for the business, excellent. Ah, here was someone else wanting a room. . . Impossible, absolutely impossible!

The luncheon was all they could have expected, and after Raymond had smoked his leisurely cigar, they strolled up the street and into the forest. So did everybody else. Those ample, sunny, welcoming woods seemed to harbor one big family party. And, what with the people and the signboards, you couldn't possibly lose your way. As they were resting at the foot of a great tree near one of the main roads, Helma looked up to see, in a carriage that rolled slowly past, the whole Runnells family. They espied her and bowed. . . To Helma it was a long, lazy, woodland dream. Perhaps there was a real world somewhere. She could let it be—for others. . . Dubosc was in Normandy. The Runnellses? What if they *had* seen her in this improbable place with this unsuspected young man? What if she *had* declined at length and rather brusquely their invitation to Moret? What of any and all of it? The world was green and blue and gold, and the earth moved toward sundown in its unalterable course. . .

After dinner they wandered back to the edge of the forest. The night was of black crystal. They walked slowly on, not daring, for fear of getting lost, to stray from the dim guidance of the highway, shimmering spectral into the darkness a few yards ahead. At length Raymond struck a match and consulted his watch. "We'd better be getting back," he said. "They don't stay up very late in the country."

In the village street with its few spaced lamps, they heard from behind the closed shutters of what looked like any other shop the sounds of an ancient and familiar revelry. "That's where the boys from the farms come in to drink and dance with the servant girls," Raymond explained. Standing on tip-toe to peer through a crevice between shutters, they could catch glimpses of couples waltzing to the clatter of a mechanical piano. Others sat at bare tables along the walls with drinks before them. Raymond helped her to stand higher, his body pressed taut against hers.

At the Boule d'Or the preliminaries of the shutting up for the night were in progress. Few guests lingered in the garden. The servants were gathering chairs together and piling tables one on top of the other. But the voluble landlady was still there, tireless in her unstaunched flow of talk.

Yes, the *garçon* would conduct them across the street in a moment, meantime they could go to the lavatories for their washing. She regretted it extremely, but across the street everything was very simple. But then, in any case, running water was the exception at Barbizon. However, so many people had taken to coming down now for all the holidays that the village would simply have to become more up-to-date. It wasn't like the old days of the painters. . .

There was the inevitable necessity of obeying the suggestion of the landlady, and Helma traversed the garden toward the lights of the lavatories, adjusting to the rusticities of a holiday Barbizon a rudimentary survival of the modesties of her native Byzantium.

At length a *garçon* was ready with their satchels and a

lantern; the landlady bade "*Monsieur et dame*" a cordial goodnight, and they stepped out with their guide into the village street. Somewhere in the shadow of the opposite wall the man opened a door, through which they passed into a court that was surrounded, as she could make out by the feeble light of the lantern, with low houses and sheds. At the right opened a stairway. Up it the *garçon* led them, while his swaying lantern sent scampering over the rough stone surface of its walls a grimacing of gargoyles in the changing shadows. At the top of the stairs they reached a little corridor, showing a succession of several doors, each closed and numbered. Before one of the doors the man set down his burdens, rattled a big key into the lock, and opened it. He stood back for them to pass, lifted in the satchels, lighted the two candles piously standing together on the night-table, and spoke his respectful "*Bonne nuit.*" Raymond passed him a coin, the man shut the door, they were alone.

The room was small and its furnishing scant—the night-table with its candles; a bed, heaped high, as French beds are; the elements of a washstand; a row of hooks in lieu of a wardrobe; and a single chair. The window was closed and shuttered.

"I'll open the window," Raymond said, "but leave the shutters closed."

"Open them too," suggested Helma.

"I will," he answered, "when I put the light out."

She hung her hat on one of the hooks and began in the cramped space the awkward experience of undressing. She rigidly avoided looking at her companion, nor could she guess that he looked at her, but somehow she knew that he had taken off his coat, his collar and necktie too, and that strange, compelling, fascinating, all-containing belt, and was slowly unlacing his shoes. Her own preparations proceeded with the proverbial invisibility, if not with the speedy deftness, of a Hindoo.

At length she was ready for the night. He knew it, she

divined, though she had not felt that he was watching her.

"Climb into bed," he directed, with the amiable tone of authority that he might have used to a child. "Your place is next the wall."

His words surprised her into glancing at him. Shoeless now, he was still in his outing-shirt and trousers. He opened his satchel and took from it a suit of rosy pajamas. Then, after a moment of deliberation, he tossed them behind him, and, with one impetuous pull, he swept the down puff and the lace counterpane together over the foot of the bed to the floor.

"The weather's too warm," he said.

She settled herself uneasily in the bed, urged down her night-robe with her feet, and drew up the sheet. Raymond blew out both candles, then stepped to the window, and with much creaking of the balky shutters, pushed them open. She saw the sky crowded with its tranquil stars and from the utter blackness beneath could trace the syncopated line of roofs and chimneys that made the opposite side of the village street. And suddenly, out of the dark, one vision which for weeks she had successfully kept back as behind an impenetrable veil obtruded and obscured all else—a predatory Spanish face, wolfish, with its snapping eyes agrin as if in mockery. She turned and ground her own face into the pillow as if to blot it out forever. . . Footsteps in the street without drew near, passed, died away. The sequent silence was of farthest ocean depths. . . The face of the Spaniard faded out. . . Where was Raymond? . . . And her heart beating thickly thundered in the silence as if it must wake from slumber the very dead . . .

She was aware of the pressure of his body, beside her, on the bed. Though she should strangle in the effort, she must speak, she must say something that would make at least a pretense of seeming casual.

"What a droll little room this is!" she managed to articulate.

As if from the incredible distance that appears in a fad-

ing anæsthesia, she heard the ghostly roguishness of his answer: "Yes, but you know what the landlady said, it's very simple here across the street." The voluble landlady survived for a moment as a mental form; then vanished. A male arm that shocked her like burning steel pushed beneath her shoulders and another crept across her face and its hand firmly turned her head its way. . . In the panting dark she lay as one blinded. . . A man's breath struck hot into her own and his lips closed over hers.

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In the early morning Helma awoke. The room was quite light. Beyond the wide-open window the houses opposite, shut and silent, stood in their soft daylight gray. Within the room she heard the regular faint breathing of healthy youth. She hardly dared to raise her head enough to make out another head, flushed and smiling in its slumber, resting beside hers. Then she sank back on her pillow. Her body, drained of all desire, seemed infinitely light, appeased in every nerve and sinew.

With the detachment of a procession, enlargements of the pictures of her life passed before her open eyes: the big house at Byzantium; the college; Spinti's parlor; Gaines's rooms; New York and the Wilkins boarding-house; Dubosc's apartment; yes, the Spaniard—and now at last without a wince;—the studio on the left bank of the Seine; the Avenue de Clichy; an inn-garden at Joinville-le-Pont. . . The unsparing pageant touched her as little as though she were dead, melting into a thought of the boy who was sleeping at her side like a child. What was he really to her? She would have turned and kissed him but for fear of waking him.

It was a momentary impulse . . . gone . . . Again she was very light, a feather borne will-less, whither she neither knew nor cared; infinitely, infinitely light; so light that slumber, returning, carried Helma Seymour far away, like a fleck of sun-ray on the tip of a summer cloud.

CHAPTER V

PARIS on Monday morning was fresh and cool. Both spoke of the world-old subject of the weather as they bade each other good-bye before the Gare de Lyon—he to go his way, she to go hers. Amid all that had happened in the two days since they had stood there before, there had been a first exchange of addresses. They separated without appointing a *rendez-vous*, mutely certain that what had been would be again.

Dubosc returned from the country Tuesday evening refreshed in body and much occupied with important news. Yes, Perret, the portly impresario of the *pince-nez*, had been of the house party. And he had arranged his season. It would be at Tours—four or five months guaranteed. All details would be settled soon. The *braves Tourangeaux* were coming across in good shape. It would be a real season. "And wonderful for you, my little Helma, for Perret insists on you as his *falcon!* He'll do your operas; you'll have actual practice; you'll learn what it is to face an audience, to conquer an audience, to win an audience. And, then, there'll be real money for you—not a great deal, but enough to pay your way—and, besides, an advance, a thousand francs" . . . As if he read something in her eyes: "No; for the present not a *sou*. This is preliminary. When you are established, on your feet, earning what you are bound to earn, then and then only you may think of a percentage to Dubosc. Meantime, his high reward is that he has made a singer, a great singer. In New York he will hear of your successes, from you, from others, and he will glory in them. . . And now you have just one thing more to learn, to be yourself."

This cryptic utterance he did not enlarge on at the time. But he reverted to it in the moment of their parting. The intervening days had been more than full for Helma. There had been discussion of the engagement with Perret

and the signing of the contract, shopping to do, the final "passing" of her rôles for Tours.

The day of Dubosc's departure came. In the disturbed and all but evacuated studio, arrayed in his travelling cloak and cap, he was watching the anxious movements of the porter engaged in removing his luggage to the carriage waiting below. At length the man was gone with the last valise and the precious, heavy box of scores; his vanishing footsteps grated from the stone staircase. Master and pupil faced each other; the man, and the girl that he had taught and saved. Nothing stood between them and the farewell which both knew would be for long. Dubosc had forbidden her to accompany him to the station. Those last dragging minutes before the train pulls out, he told her, were peculiarly repugnant to him. They would say good-bye there in the abandoned studio, where they had worked together and where success had visited her in the person of the portly impresario with the *pince-nez*.

"Now, just a word from your old Dubosc. You know, Helma, I saved you once. Don't do it again, my girl, for I shan't be here to save you a second time. Don't." She bowed her head, speechless, aware of the blood that was mantling her cheeks. "You are on your own now; for God's sake, *sois prudente et sage, sois très, très sage*. Your gift is too precious, too rare, to be thrown away on any scoundrel on this earth. I have said enough. Good-bye, my girl. God bless you a million times! May every prosperity rain its reward upon you! Good-bye!"

He took her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. In the tumult of her emotions she was dumb. The sound of his steps reached her as he went down to his carriage. What! Dubosc had gone and without a single syllable from her! She checked an impulse to tear after him. No, he had gone, and she . . . ?

In the deserted studio *she* was not alone. The man who had made possible her career had departed, but the career was present with her. She stood like the master-swimmer

on the brink, ensorcelled by the sweeping current that must bear her on. Her body quivered voluptuously in the inevitable, amorous delay, craving the plunge and knowing it sweeter for the brief retard. "*Helma Seymour, première chanteuse d'opéra*"; was there not a music in those words more magical, more thrilling, than any voiced by reed or mellow horn? Dubosc had gone, but the day of his going was a scimitar unscabbarded.

In the deserted studio Helma was not alone. She was there with her career and—a remembrance of Raymond, like the distant shimmer of plucked strings, fleet and soft as summer breezes, and an echo of celestial fiddles broadly bowed.

In these last overcharged days she had stolen only twice a scant ten minutes for Raymond—always the *terrasse* of the Avenue de Clichy. When she had told him of her engagement for Tours, he had frowned a moment; then, unknitting his brows, "Why mightn't I go too?" he asked.

"But your *place*," she objected, she could not have said exactly why.

"Oh, that is easily left," he answered negligently. "Besides, I have still a good bit of my baccarat winnings. A little sojourn in *la belle Touraine* after a summer in Paris!"—his glowing countenance told the rest.

The one who had been master, parent, guide, savior, was gone; but had not Raymond been savior too? At any rate, in all the eagerness of youth and art they should be going together to Tours. As Helma stepped from the studio she felt only that the afternoon was golden. Toward Dubosc her heart flowed over with its gratitude, but the light of heaven was about her and she was young, and with her in Tours would be another who was young, Raymond.

CHAPTER VI

THERE were to be three weeks of rehearsing at Tours before the season opened. Helma and Raymond took time by the forelock, gathered their belongings into two trunks (she was not yet a prima donna) and a number of valises, and went down to Tours a week ahead of the rest of the company. For a sum that seemed to Helma nothing at all they found a lodging that looked out on the cathedral square, and there they straightway set up "housekeeping." It was distinctly of the kind that in Byzantium was called "light." But, for all that, it had its problems, which the French boy showed at once he knew far more about solving than the American girl. He had the national aptitude for the kitchen, and such little matters as coaxing a fire to burn in stove or fireplace, trimming the lamps so that they would not smoke, regulating the cumbersome French windows and their rebellious attachments, and twenty other details of the *ménage* he seemed to understand as by second nature.

"That comes," he told her, "of being brought up in a country where your 'modern conveniences' and all that sort of thing are only just coming in now. We French all have to learn something about shifting for ourselves—unless we are very wealthy and can afford an army of servants."

As to their own exchequer and its modest disbursements, nothing had been said. For some things, including the infinitesimal rent, Helma paid as a matter of course. But Raymond paid for other things, equally as a matter of course. It was very informal and un-French, but it worked to a charm. And so they learned of Tours together.

From their living-room windows they could study the sculptured façade of the cathedral, in its rich *morbidezza* the most feminine of the many cathedrals of France. And they could try to guess which house it was that Balzac's guileless *curé* had inhabited. Both knew that Balzac was of Tours and they proposed reading together his "Curé de

Tours." But, as in the case of a nameless, if still more celebrated, volume, the reading was never finished. The guide-book spoke to them also of Rabelais and Descartes and of that winsome Duchesse de la Vallière, who, ceasing to be a great king's mistress, ended her days as the sorrowing Sœur Louise de la Miséricorde. At Byzantium Helma had heard of them all; even the last could not be quite excluded from the college cosmos. Raymond likewise knew them by name, but their kinship with the actual scene hardly seemed to stir him at all. Helma marvelled a little at the slight imprint which the *lycée* had left on the healthy, practical spirit of the lad; but then, she had to admit to herself, the illustrious dead just now did not interest her keenly either. The present was too much with her, and, rainbow-like, before her glowed the imminent future, a shining bridge to the long-dreamed-of career. And here and now, better than any historic memory, were the breakfasts and luncheons that Raymond concocted with her in their little *pied-à-terre;* the rambles in the autumnal boulevards and parks of the engardened city, the brisk tramps along the *quais*, beyond whose tree-lined parapets the Loire, swollen from equinoctial rains, angrily whirled seaward.

Or they crossed afoot the wonder of the old stone bridge and in the Place Choiseul, over at St. Symphorien, boarded a rattling little tram and presently were bumping along toward Vouvray, where, for a mere franc, the *patron* of the *comptoir* parted with a litre of his light and foaming vintage. Or, through the wide Avenue de Grammont, whose ranks of trees by this time stood almost in a winter nudity, they strolled back until the land dropped abruptly to the low meadows traversed by the tranquil Cher, beloved in summertime of fishermen, making its unhurrying way to join the greater river that eventually carries its waters to the ocean. Fitter pastimes these for eager youth than wearing eyes out with the printed page or risking broken bones among the treacherous stairways and dim vaults of mouldering old houses.

At night they went out to dinner at a little restaurant where the motherly *patronne* received them with attentions which she might have bestowed on her own children; and after dinner, the naïve but never-failing diversion of the *café concert*, which Helma enjoyed the more because Raymond enjoyed it utterly. . . Here was Raymond, and here was Tours, and here was her contract safely packed in her trunk! . . . By the time the rest of the troupe reached town, young Monsieur et Madame Raymond had come to be regarded almost as life-long residents of Touraine.

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The arrival of the company meant immediate and hard work. Rehearsing had begun at once and consumed much of each day. Helma was the joy of the *chef d'orchestre* and his *aide*, for they found her already letter-perfect in the parts that Dubosc had taught her, and then, she was musical, a quick study. No beating a new rôle into her noddle note by note with curses and a bludgeon, only to find it had to be beaten in as brutally a second time and a third! "That girl has brains, musical brains," she proudly heard the *chef d'orchestre* tell Perret, "and what a voice! They'll hear her from Tours to Paris and think a siren is singing!"

The *régisseur* showed perceptibly less enthusiasm. Madame Seymour (the Madame out of courtesy to Raymond) was not a born actress. True, she had notions about the playing of her parts, but they were sometimes inadmissible. Moreover, Madame Seymour had neither experience of the stage nor an unmistakable instinct to guide her. This from the *régisseur*, when musically everything was going on without a hitch, could not help causing Helma a little chagrin. But she remembered Dubosc's reservations about her dramatic endowment and refrained from accusing the man of prejudice or malice. His "inadmissible" she cheerfully set down to differences between his conception of a rôle and Dubosc's. Dubosc might be the peerless trainer of a voice, but that supremacy hardly meant

that his idea of the composition of a character was the only one possible. Now was her chance to learn from this *régisseur* (who appeared sincerely anxious to teach her) as she had done from Dubosc, and then to practise professionally what she had learned.

If the art of operatic acting still lay mainly before her, she would not fail to master it through any lack of what her French associates called "*bonne volonté*." And, as the *régisseur* admitted, she was a fine figure of a woman and by no means ungraceful in her movements, and he soon found that her earnestness and her steadfast determination to advance made the work of the teacher comparatively easy. In reporting to Perret the progress of his pupil, at the end of the first fortnight, the *régisseur*, it reached Helma's ears, had in effect said this: "Madame Seymour, I fear, will never be a great dramatic *artiste;* that spark is lacking from her admirable equipment. But I believe she won't be a bad actress either, and each year will find improvement, for that girl is no more afraid of work than a Basque wharfman. Besides, on the stage, she'll always somehow live up to her voice. And," echoing the words of the *chef d'orchestre*, "what a voice!"

Perret deemed it the part of wisdom not to present Helma the opening night of the season. Evidently he felt that he was staking a good deal on the success of his dark horse. Whether she ran to victory or to defeat, the second night, in his professional opinion, was the occasion indicated for the try-out. Furthermore, the rumor of the gifted young *Américaine* was spreading. Naturally other members of the company were not silent regarding the soprano from New York who had come all the way to Tours for a *début*, and whatever else they may have said about her, one and all had to speak well of her voice. Then it was only a matter of a day or two for the quick *Tourangeaux* to link up the possessor of this voice with the tall, fair girl who took so many long walks and often dropped in on the *café concert*, always with the same youthful and alert *galant* at

her elbow. Perret was quite right in his assumption that whenever la Seymour should first sing the house would be full—another reason for postponing her *début* from the opening night, which always packs a theatre anyway.

So to begin the season he decided on "Carmen." And there was a dash of special spice in that selection, since Perret announced his choice as out of compliment to his leading contralto, Madame Victoria Chardonnet, celebrating this year her twenty-fifth season on the stage—and a better Carmen now than ever was the sincere verdict of those who had known her long.

For Helma Madame Chardonnet was the only member of Perret's troupe that awakened more than a professional interest, and there was nothing surprising about this, since Madame Chardonnet, she soon found, was one of the "characters" of the French provincial stage. Early in life this sagacious lady had come to the conclusion that Paris and other great capitals were not for her. She accordingly focussed her energies on becoming indispensable to the less pretentious opera houses of the provinces. And she succeeded. She never had had a particularly good voice, but from the outset the stage was her home, and with the years she picked up an experience and a repertory which in France were certainly unparalleled. Moreover, managers knew they could absolutely rely on her never to disappoint. "Give me La Chardonnet," one grateful enthusiast had said, "and already I have my troupe!"

Thus she sang in every city or town of France that opera companies visited, save only Paris, becoming to French provincials a sort of household word. She was orderly in her life and prudent in expenditures. Once she had had a husband for a while, and when he went out he left a little money behind him. This, with her own earnings, had made her in a modest way independent. As a result, when ever La Chardonnet joined a company she took a cosy little suite in a good hotel, unpacked her lares and penates, and settled herself to an undisputed reign for the time being as

grande dame extraordinary and *arbitrix elegantiarum* of the operatic establishment. Before she had passed her middle thirties it occurred to somebody to dub her "La Reine Victoria." Though this allusion to plump British majesty did not fit her physically (La Chardonnet happened to be a slight and mobile woman), the regnant attribution had its aptness, and it stuck.

A silver jubilee "Carmen" in honor of La Reine Victoria —such was the high festivity decreed for the opening night. To the second was allotted the *début* of the *Américaine*. At first Perret inclined toward "Faust" as a favorable "vehicle" to display her talents. Besides, given his company, he could cast "Faust" in other respects effectively. But the *régisseur* pointed out that Marguerite's initial entrance at the kermesse would be a pretty severe ordeal for a girl who had never faced a real audience. If she botched that, and even singers of experience often did, she would probably be so upset that she'd make a sorry mess of the "*Roi de Thulé*" and the "Jewel Song," and the whole thing might end in a *fiasco*, which would be particularly serious in the case of a young foreigner of whom so much was expected. These provincial publics were curious in their exactions, in what they refused to accept as well as in what they sometimes applauded heartily. The excellent *Tourangeaux*, touched in their artistic vanity, might never give the girl another chance. Perret saw the shrewd sense of the man's reasoning and eventually settled on "Le Trouvère," because Léonore has much to sing and to sing gloriously, while the acting can go hang as long as the singing heroine sports a black-silk evening-gown.

Yet every piece of operatic amber has its fly; here the difficulty was the tenor. Perret's *fort ténor* was not most *fort* in the highest register. Suppose the audience seized on the fatal idea that he was slighting notes which he ought to emphasize. Once more the curious exactions of these provincials! . . . But Perret hit on a way out. A personal examination of the score, at the urgent suggestion of

the *chef d'orchestre*, proved to the astute impresario that "Le Trouvère" is not written for the tenor by any means so high as it habitually is sung. So he published the vindicative information that his production would present the music in a "purified" version—that is, as Verdi actually wrote it. Thus the impresario emerged from his embarrassment with colors flying, a tenor salvaged and true art served. The choice pleased Helma mightily; wasn't Léonore a rôle that she had studied with Dubosc phrase by phrase, from the first note to the last, and the acting of it too? The acting had even cost their one approach to a quarrel! Moreover, as soon as the engagement at Tours seemed probable, Dubosc had insisted on a thorough passing of the rôle in the French translation. So Helma felt prepared.

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At length came the great day of the *début*. Late in the morning Perret and his *chef d'orchestre* called to inspect the *débutante*. The conductor tried her voice and pronounced it in first-rate condition. Perret said a shrewd and heartening word: "Make all the mistakes you please, Madame, only make them boldly" . . . These men were really very kind, she thought; everybody was kind to her.

For the rest, she and Raymond stayed prudently indoors. She examined her costume and found it right in every detail. That, a smock frock for the making up, and a few minor requisites she had the boy carefully put into a couple of valises, crushing nothing. At one they ate a light meal, which they had prepared together. When it had been cleared away, they sat talking quietly of unimportant matters until he urged a nap. She lay down for a time, but did not sleep. The stream of thought coursed unremittingly through her brain. And now came one to haunt her like a black masque at a royal feast. And *he* once was to have directed the launching of her career! Over and over in her mind, to banish the hateful memory, she repeated like an exorcism, "Raymond, Raymond, Raymond, Ray-

mond." Finally she must have spoken the name aloud, for Raymond came over to her and lay down on the bed beside her, and into the nook of his shoulders she nestled her head, feeling little and warm and protected, even from the unpitying past. So the spectre of Spanish evil faded into the shadows.

Toward five la Reine Victoria called in person. This was indeed an honor. Her majesty received visits; she rarely made them. Besides, she was singing Azucena that evening. However, in this altogether exceptional case she stopped for a minute to give the *débutante* a veteran's advice. "Don't attach the least importance to anything you do to-night," she said: "then everything will be well." Whereupon, tactfully, she was gone.

"They're all giving you good counsel," remarked Raymond, "but I'm going to do something a little more practical; I'm going to heat some milk for you before we start."

When she had swallowed the milk and he had bundled her into her ample cloak, he closed the valises and they were off for the little journey to the theatre, walking like two young *ouvriers,* in the wet November dusk.

Helma had not even thought about the luxury of a personal maid; Raymond fulfilled that function as a matter of course, supplemented by the maid-in-general to the troupe and the hair-dresser. Out on the stage Ferrando was singing his lugubrious ballad when Léonore at length sat robed in black-satin state in her dressing-room, equipped for the scene. Raymond, before she noticed what he was doing, had reopened a valise which she had supposed emptied and produced a bottle and a glass. The bottle bore a champagne label.

"No, not that," protested Helma.

"But just a little courage, just to start you off," he coaxed. "Most of them do it."

"Perhaps they do," she replied, "but I must not. I will make this entrance on my own. Later, if I feel tired or weak, I'll take some."

Obediently Raymond put the bottle away.

"Call for Madame Seymour!" There was a rap on the *loge* door. Mechanically Helma got up, and Raymond, opening the door, took her arm and led her down the corridor to the looming dimness of the wings. Perret and the *régisseur* were standing there like a pair of shadowy conspirators; near them the little *comprimaria*, the Inez of the cast, who should escort the prima donna on. The little woman took the arm that Raymond passed to her. "Now," spoke the *régisseur*. They walked forward toward the Spanish moonlight of the scene, Helma automatically, as if still in a dream. Faintly she heard the orchestra, like a distant murmuring; she saw the *chef's* baton beating wide rhythms against the moderately lighted house. The serried rows of spectators looked astonishingly close and like wooden puppets set there by one directing hand. She was aware of a rustling that might be applause; she could not be sure. But the music was of her as her nature. She opened her mouth and entered on the beat.

The moment she began to sing she thought only of her singing, and an old injunction of Dubosc's was a ground-bass to consciousness: *"Surtout, ne poussez jamais!"* She knew the music was ingrained in her and she let the recitative carry her for the moment, as a swimmer mechanically keeping with the stream. Her part paused, and the *comprimaria* led her up stage and down again while the orchestra played the opening measures of Léonore's *andante*. Then she began that long *cantabile*. Strictly obedient always to Dubosc's word, she made no effort, just sang onward. When she had finished the cadenza she distinctly heard a round of clapping from the house. Now, with gathering confidence, she attacked the *allegro*. Her *staccati* leapt, her rhythm sparkled; the concluding scale she carried as Verdi wrote it, in true *falcon* fashion, from high C down to the contralto A flat. No other soprano, Dubosc had told her, now dared do that!

A volcanic tension of applause was waiting to break loose,

whose premonitory rumblings some impatient persons nervously hissed down. She had still the repeat to sing. But knowledge that she had won nerved Helma as no beaker of champagne could do. From head to foot she felt the transfigurating thrill of it. And the repeat of the *allegro* she poured forth with all her golden plenitude of voice, all the defiant glitter of her bravura. What if the thing *was* rotten musically! Hadn't she the wherewithal to conjure from its shoddy measures a chivalric charge of knights in tournament?

At the last note the house rose; applause and shouting threatened to lift the very roof. She could not have told how often she bowed. And then in sudden panic she fled into the wings, and no amount of managerial insistence could urge her out. Raymond was at her side; he put his arms around her quivering body. There she stood, held fast in his young strength until the baritone had done with dark asides and the tenor was serenading. Once more she stepped forth, poised and ready for the bloodthirsty trio that ends the act. And when in confident pride she dared to hurl the final D flat into the upper octave, there was pandemonium in Tours. Tenor and baritone perforce withdrew, leaving the triumphant *débutante* to gather her honors alone.

For Helma the thing was over then and there. Had she, like Victoria Chardonnet, been five and twenty seasons on the stage, she could scarcely at that moment have felt her career more securely an accomplished fact. After the years of work and preparation the fight was won! . . . Perret, the *régisseur*, the *chef d'orchestre* came to her *loge* overflowing with felictations, and close on their heels la Reine Victoria—hardly recognizable in gypsy stripes and beads—who kissed her. When the door had closed on these exalted visits, she turned to Raymond with a little curtsey of undisguised delight. "Now, *mon petit chéri*, that I've received the visits of honor, we can have a few minutes to ourselves and I must try to relax a little."

How she went through the next two acts she scarcely knew, but somehow they passed. Before the last act, where Léonore has music of beauty and pith and must sing it or fail, she consented to just one glass of Raymond's wine: "I'm so tired I don't feel as if I could ever drag myself back to the stage. Isn't it true, though, a good runner runs best when he's tired? . . . And please don't let anybody bother me afterwards—above all no party! That can be for another evening. Just by ourselves, you and I, we'll walk home together . . . and then some blessed sleep!" . . .

The local press the following day rang with the good fortune of the *jeune Américaine*, and telegraph and cable bore word of it to other parts of the world.

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From this time on their life at Tours had the inward richness of her assured success. Outwardly it changed little. There was less rehearsing now that the season had got well under way, but there were more long walks. *"Oh, ces Américaines!"* was the repeated exclamation of an abiding astonishment as Helma and her escort tramped by, indifferent to wind and weather: she the embodiment of health and energy, Raymond flushed and sparkling in the race beside her. At home he was always devotion itself. He insisted that she should not get up too early, the only rule he imposed on their life together. So from her cosy place in bed she would see him jumping around every morning, starting the fire, making coffee, heating water for her bath. But Helma was not in any way an indolent animal, and, once up and on her feet, she did her share of the work as usual. They remained faithful to the tiny restaurant, where now the landlady made no bones about their being the very apple of her eye.

Of course Helma had shortly to sing in other operas besides "Le Trouvère," though the old standby, as "purified" for Perret's purposes, enjoyed three repetitions, no less, dur-

ing the first fortnight. Nobody denied that its impressive record was due to the pretty triumph won by the *jeune Américaine* at her *début*, though the *fort ténor* had a good deal to say to all and sundry about the artistic importance of an "authentic" Manrique, cleansed at last from the rank overgrowth of parasitic tradition.

"Faust" came next in turn for Helma. Here the bigwigs of the company agreed that Marguerite was not quite her affair, in spite of her being northern and a natural blond, —accidental facts to which these argumentative Frenchmen appeared to attach a solemn importance. In "Lohengrin" and in "Aïda," however, she met every expectation. Both were operas that Dubosc had held perilous for so young a voice, but she was careful never to force tone. So precautioned, "Lohengrin," if not quite "Aïda," she found actually less trying than "Le Trouvère"—one more proof, if one still were needed, of the soundness of the schooling that she had received.

The day of the season's first "Manon" the *chanteuse légère* fell suddenly ill. Thereupon it developed that Perret in such crises had clung doggedly to one cherished superstition. Though the heavens crashed about him, in all his years as impresario he never yet had consented to a change of bill. The deluge first! . . . So he sent his reluctant *régisseur* to Helma. ("Pardon the great liberty I take, Monsieur le Directeur, but Manon is not at all the affair of Madame Seymour; less, much less, than Marguerite!")

She already knew the part of Manon pretty well, she told the troubled messenger of governance (hadn't she thoroughly studied the principal scenes with Dubosc?); why should she *not* sing it that night? If the *chef d'orchestre* could coach her for a couple of hours, she would guarantee to have all the music in her head in ample time for the performance. The bits of dialogue she would begin to memorize at once; she was sure she shouldn't have to overwork the prompter! Then he, the kindly *régisseur*, might spare her an

hour before the first curtain for the *mise-en-scène* and some additional time in the *entr'actes*. With a little indulgence for the extraordinary circumstance, she believed she could get through the evening without serious mishap.

It was a bold undertaking, but Helma attacked it with all the relish of young adventure. Here she could show them! Perret, when she reached the theatre to rehearse, embraced her in his joy, calling her again and again his "*brave fille*," and both the *chef d'orchestre* and the *régisseur* were all that was considerate and helpful. Besides whom there was Raymond. The boy threw himself into the day's business with an unimaginable gusto, raced back and forth between their lodging and the theatre, drilled her in the dialogue till she really knew it by heart, carried her soup and coffee lest one precious second should be lost, and made himself generally invaluable. Had he been able to, he would have sung and acted for her!

So Helma applied herself to the evening's task in a mood of impetuous enthusiasm, and always she was borne along by the joyous memory of the garden restaurant at Joinville-le-Pont. Everybody told her that the second-act entrance had never been sung so splendidly (of course she had had to sing it twice). What an amazing upper range and what miraculous agility for a *voix de falcon!* Why, this astonishing *Américaine* was everything, even an excellent *chanteuse légère!* . . . But she was not Manon. The silence of her colleagues on that point came home to Helma after the work and the shouting were over. Besides, the press, when the dilatory notices appeared, spoke out. The reviewers complimented warmly the courage and intelligence that had "got up" a part like Manon in a single day, and as for the bravura in the Cours-la-Reine, praise of voice and execution passed all bounds. But equally the gentlemen of the press were sure that Manon as a whole was hardly a rôle for the *jeune Américaine*. The real Manon is an expert actress and a Parisian to her fingertips.

Helma herself recognized the truth of the contention. And then, too, for her to sing Manon's music was, after all, a bit of a *tour de force,* not quite in her real line, though she was conscious that she had done it well, as a genuine pupil of Dubosc could do anything well! At any rate the whole thing had been a grand adventure, and her way of carrying it off had won her added respect from all of her colleagues, as well as the undying gratitude of her director, who, thanks to her, still bore proudly aloft his immaculate escutcheon, unblotted by a single change of bill. But Helma resolved never, for Perret or anybody else, to attempt the rôle of Manon again, whatever she might do in concert with *"Je marche sur tous les chemins."*

CHAPTER VII

So THE winter ran its appointed course, and Helma rejoiced in the happy and successful functioning of her talent, in the increasing fruitfulness of her work. Perret made no secret of it to his troupe that the season was prospering beyond his fondest dreams. And his guarantors in Tours and the neighboring country were quite ecstatic over what he was doing for them; so much so that they came forward with an offer to back their impresario in a *"grande représentation de gala"* which, the last week of March, should bring the season to an end in a blaze of glory. Their proposition was to put on "Les Huguenots" (with its second act at Chenonceaux and consequently as much the property of Touraine as of Paris) the concluding night on a really sumptuous scale, engaging as "guest" for that occasion the Irish-French tenor John O'Brien. Who else, indeed, on the French stage, possessed the high voice and the finished art to sing Raoul in the original keys and with all the traditional elegance and *panache?* Certainly not Perret's *fort ténor* of the "Trouvère" so adroitly "purified"! Gallant John O'Brien it must be!

But Perret, with his acute business sense, persuaded the

backers that they had better make the gala double. They would get O'Brien not for a single "Huguenots," but for two; one the week previous to the closing, the other the last night. Then the labor of preparation need not all be spent on a solitary performance. Perret was sure he could more easily induce the tenor to discommode himself for the two at a slightly lower figure each than for just one, and he had no doubt they should be able to sell the house out twice at a double scale of prices. Naturally Perret had been in touch with O'Brien and was pretty certain of his ground. So his counsel carried the day and the double gala was decreed.

Merrily the company started its work of studying and rehearsing for the great event. Of course La Seymour should sing Valentine, the rôle identified more than any other with its illustrious creator, Cornélie Falcon, who had bestowed her name forever after on the race of French dramatic sopranos. . .

John O'Brien reached Tours a week before the first of the galas. As it happened, he had had no engagement for that week, he said, and he was glad of the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with some of the *châteaux* of Touraine. He would have brought along the wife and family for a little holiday in their own France if the good lady hadn't got it into her head that she must run off to Rome for Easter and take the oldest daughter with her.

This tenor, as la Reine Victoria loved to tell in some detail, for she had sung with him *en province* both in his 'prentice years and later on, had become at forty almost a legendary figure. He was scholar, writer, traveller, bohemian, and as *bon vivant* ranked second to none on either bank of the Seine; and with all that, a warm-hearted, truculent, delightful Irish gentleman, speaking the brogue of his native country undeterred by a cycle of French living. Nature had bestowed on him an exceptional voice, and so, by grace of nature, he turned singer. But for the accident of voice, he would probably have become a professional man

of letters, or perhaps embarked on a political or a diplomatic career. He had the volatility of his race and did what he did easily; otherwise, Victoria hinted, he might not have done it at all. But, then, O'Brien was so many men within one belt; he was even after a fashion a Frenchman, for his parents had brought him from Ireland to Rouen when he was not yet seven years old. First he was educated at the *lycée* of his adopted city. When, later, the voice put forth its paramount claim, he entered the Paris Conservatory. Thus the spirited Irish lad grew up a "*véritable artiste français.*" Marriage with Micheline Dumont, painter of modish miniatures and Parisian to the bone, had, as he put it, wedded him to France.

Of course Victoria asked O'Brien to tea the day of his arrival, and that gentle ceremonial at Her Majesty's hotel was the occasion of Helma's meeting her new and eminent colleague. There was nothing stand-offish or up-stage about this tall, lean Irishman, with the pleasant Celtic face. He spoke to her at once in English, an outland tongue that only they two understood, and of which she had not heard a syllable in so many months. His first words, she couldn't deny the accusing evidence, did call tears to her eyes—a little revenge of her Byzantine childhood!

The tenor told her he had heard in Paris of her phenomenal voice. "Now, naturally, I'm eager to believe what I've heard." There was a humorous purse to his lips and his eyes took a sudden interest in the bibelots on Victoria's mantelpiece. "If I were a Dublin man, it would be easy. But, being from Cork, I'm a rebel, and must be convinced."

His eyes shot back to her with the jolliest twinkle. Surely the big tenor must be what was known in Byzantium as a "regular case"! At any rate, from the day of this meeting it was "Helma" and "Raymond" to honest John O'Brien, for he straightway took the young pair under his favoring wing.

No one, Perret least of all, had expected his stellar "guest" to participate in more than one, the final, rehearsal. But

O'Brien, the morning after his arrival, reported for work as promptly as the humblest chorus man. With Helma he went over in scrupulous detail the music and stage business of their scenes together. They were wonderful for the girl, those daily rehearsals with *the* Raoul of the French stage; greedily she devoured the manna of their yielding. Then big John hired the only public automobile the town boasted in that age of equine innocence, and off he would drive, taking her always, and Raymond, and either Perret or Victoria to complete the foursome, and so they inspected Chenonceaux and its bleak March gardens personally, or had a ramble about Loches, or lunched well, if a little late, at Chinon.

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Only too quickly the week rushed by, and the night of the first gala, and her first Valentine, was at hand.

In spite of all the rehearsing and of O'Brien's kindly aid, Helma awaited this performance with an apprehension that even her *début* had not aroused. In the first place, she was so eager to sustain her share in the gala worthily and at least to live up to the expectations of her big Irish colleague, and then there was the difficulty of the part itself. O'Brien spoke of that at their early tea *chez* Victoria. "But it needn't frighten *you;* I can tell that from the way you've rehearsed," he added reassuringly as he wished her well. She did not see him again until she saw him on the stage.

In her dressing-room, to her own mortification, she was singularly nervous and distraught. Twice she rubbed her make-up off and went through the labor of painting and powdering herself again. She fumed and fretted over hooks and pins. The hair-dresser, when he came with the wig, scarcely recognized in her the self-possessed and courteous Madame Seymour.

"I never saw you like this before, Helma," Raymond ventured when the man had gone. She turned on the pre-

sumptuous youth like an adjudging fury and showed him the door.

"Now not so much as the shadow of you here until the fourth act is over; then you can be right on the spot with your *sacré* champagne. Tell the wardrobe woman I'll need her to dress me. I'm *tout-ce-qu'y-a de canaille* to-night. *Va-t-en vite! A tantôt!*" And alone, with Raymond out of the way, she could breathe.

The problem of her entrance the first night in "Le Trouvère" had been nothing; *régisseur* and *comprimaria* had managed that. But this unaccompanied descent of the long flight of steps in the counterfeit presentment of the Chenonceaux gardens, and the climb to the side of the queen on her throne, where, apropos of nothing, Valentine must assume a pleasing expression as if about to be photographed! —her heart quailed at that, and she found herself childishly counting the steps, as if it made any difference in their number or could save her from the possibility of treading on her petticoat. She could see O'Brien as the elegant and shy Raoul, she could see her other comrades of the company, but it was as if she had never looked on them before. When the moment came for her to sing, she sang, hardly realizing that she did so. It seemed an age before the curtain finally fell on the ranting septet, and when the bowing was over she walked moodily off to her *loge* alone. Raymond had taken her at her word and was not to be seen anywhere. Nobody else bothered about her at all, except the wardrobe-woman, who eventually came to help her with her next costume. The woman could give her so little time that Helma found herself waiting in solitude for many minutes. There she sat expecting the call and thinking anxiously of the interminable high C in the approaching duet with Marcel, according to many, the most difficult soprano C in all opera. And she could not help saying to herself: "Helma Seymour, you're a rank amateur after all! You are only half a singer, you don't know your business, you've let a

little provincial success go to your head. You're a poor silly bungler!"

In spite of this gloomy rumination she knew that she weathered the next act after a fashion and at least carried away from it the consoling certainty that she had not missed the problematic C. And once more, her costume duly changed, she waited all alone for the summons to the big fourth act—the act that has to be "done," on which the ultimate effect of Meyerbeer's whole score hangs. Raymond was still away and neither Perret, Victoria, nor any of the others came to her door with a word of cheer . . . Yet, as she walked on the stage, she felt a little more the rhythm of the occasion, the free joy of the stroke on stroke, until the sight of O'Brien chilled her. He might have whispered one word of praise or encouragement in their brief first dialogue; but he was as impersonal as if she were a singing automaton. In the big combinations that followed Helma had to attend so sharply to her music that she forgot all else. For the nonce she was just the careful workman. But when the poniards had been blessed and the massacre of St. Bartholomew mapped out, she was conscious that a change had been wrought in her. Again she was the avid singer. And as Raoul-O'Brien stepped from his hiding-place behind the tapestries, Helma entered with him on their great duet with her accustomed joy in the sheer functioning.

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And the moment came—that melody all flame and sovereign passion, soaring above the orchestral weavings like an archangel floating on a river of celestial lights: *"Tu l'as dit, oui, tu m'aimes!"* She could hear the tenor attack it in the original key, and like a supreme performer on the violin, sweep his unmatched voice ever higher and higher until duet, angel, tenor, all seemed transfigured and lifted into upper ether even beyond companionship with the stars. Something gave in her, and, transfigured, she answered, her voice mounting after his across the cosmic distances: *"C'est*

la mort! Voici l'heure! Il n'est pas d'avenir!" It was the sublimation of herself in song. . . The shouts and poundings of the packed house fell on them like a douche of ice-cold water. It was over, they had sung it. But the house was in no state to let them go like that, and before Helma realized it they were plunged in the duet a second time, and life and death were alike forgot in the rapture of the singing.

In her dressing-room, she found Raymond, with his bottle of champagne.

"I'm almost dead," she gasped. "Give me a little of that stuff."

"But, Helma, you've had the triumph of your life!" the boy declared, as he held the glass to her lips.

"Perhaps," she answered vaguely, "I don't know; how *could* I know?"

At that moment there was a knock on the door. Directly the compelling figure of Raoul occupied its frame. O'Brien spoke in English.

"I just want to tell you, Helma," he said, "I've sung 'Les Huguenots' with the greatest of them all, with Lilli Lehmann, with Rose Caron in her best days, with your own Nordica, and even with old Gabrielle Krauss when I was very young; but never, never, on my road from Cork to Tours, have I heard this duo sung as you sang it just now. Take it or leave it, as you wish, you are the greatest dramatic soprano in the world."

"You never said one word to me for four acts," slipped from her in spite of herself.

"Because I was watching you, and I wanted to see just what you would do in a new part, thrown on your own resources and the tender mercies of the prompter."

And he was gone before she could thank him for his praise.

The fifth act had still to be disposed of. But Helma cared little whether she was in it or not. For now she was treading on air.

"To-morrow," she thought, "I must write this to Dubosc. It's his work. I owe it all to his knowledge and devotion."

CHAPTER VIII

The week that intervened between the first and the final galas slipped quickly by. In the course of it Helma sang once—the rôle of her *début* in "Le Trouvère." And there were walks and drives and jollifications, generously planned and conducted by the unstinting O'Brien, who pronounced this his own *grande semaine.* "*Et puis,*" as Victoria knowingly remarked, "*il est tout naturel qu'il dépense généreusement son argent. Il est largement payé, notre grand ténor!*"

On the night of the great concluding performance the tenor was anything but stand-offish; indeed, he came to Helma's dressing-room a quarter of an hour before the curtain.

"Now, Helma," he said, "I want you to do your very best to-night from your first note to your last. I don't mean you should force yourself, but don't save too much for the fourth act. Give Chenonceaux and the Pré aux Clercs their due, without slighting St. Bartholomew. . . Let's both do our best! Let's show them! . . . What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

"Of course!" she answered him gaily.

As a matter of fact, Helma was undertaking her second Valentine with a degree of light-heartedness and assurance. How could she help it after O'Brien's praise? From her entrance she knew that she was doing something definite with the part—no further fear that she was rankly amateurish, totally ineffectual, or anything of that sort! And she could tell from the occasional glances which O'Brien gave her and a whispered aside or two that the tenor was satisfied. So when the fourth act came, once more she was swimming in full flood. The big duet, to be sure, did not absolutely transfigure her as it had the week before; still,

she mounted to it valiantly, both vocally and emotionally. And again the house left the singers no choice but to repeat the scene.

O'Brien followed her to her dressing-room.

"Splendid, Helma," he said, "*épatant!* You did well all through, and you were magnificent in the duet. But I fancy you're tired out with it all; I'm tired myself, I'm dog tired, and I don't propose to see any of these people after the performance! Raymond, do you want to do me a favor and run over to the Bar Charentais and order a little supper for the three of us? Some good hors d'œuvres ready when we get there; then tell them we'll have a big omelet *aux truffes*, camembert if it's just right, and a bottle of the wine that the *patron* knows I drink. He can put the omelet on the fire the moment he sees us turn the corner. . . You will? That's fine!"

Raymond was off in a jiffy. Then the tenor continued:

"I didn't want to tell you this before, Helma, but I persuaded Roger to come down for this performance."

"Roger?"

"Yes, the director of the Opéra at Paris. Nobody else knew he was coming, not even Perret."

The director of the Opéra at Paris. . . For one astonished moment her heart stood still and her blood left her.

"Why, Helma, your eyes are popping out of your head! Yes, he arrived during the Chenonceaux scene and didn't budge from his seat until the end of the third act, when he came back to see me."

So, all unsuspecting, she had stood at the bar of judgment. Good God, how had she sung! And was this fair?

"And then . . . ?"

"And then? Well, before we had reached the fourth act, mind you, he was full of you already, crazy about you, couldn't stop talking about your extraordinary voice and the way you took the C in the duet with Marcel. And he determined then and there on a revival of 'Les Huguenots' for May, with you and me to head the cast."

"With you and me? . . . In Paris? . . ."

"Why certainly in Paris. Where did you suppose? And he would offer you the engagement to-night if I hadn't told him that after the performance we have an appointment which has to be kept."

"Appointment! What appointment?—Oh, that supper! But that's nothing. Why, I can see him to-night!" Paris . . . May. . . Her career was storming at her ears.

O'Brien laughed briefly.

"To-morrow will be time enough. Then he will hand you a contract. You see, I understand this sort of thing better than you do. But there's something I must ask you to agree to. Before you sign yourself up, I want to have a little talk with you alone. And with the fifth act still to do we've got no time now. Roger is taking the five-thirty express for Paris to-morrow. At four we are all to have tea *chez* Victoria. I want you to meet me at three at the Univers in the *salon* downstairs. Roger will join us a little later, and then the affair will be clinched."

If at that moment O'Brien had asked her to swim the Loire, she would not have refused him.

"Very well," she said. "I shall be there at three."

"But, just one thing more." O'Brien eyed her keenly. "Raymond must not be at our conference. Find some excuse, no matter what, to have him away—some errand. This concerns Roger and you and me, nobody else. You understand, that's imperative."

Helma assented mechanically. All this had come so quickly and had so taken her by surprise that she had scarcely begun to comprehend it yet, let alone to speculate as to motives. But she had no objection to offer.

O'Brien nodded in response to her assent.

"Better not say anything to Raymond to-night about Roger being here. He'd hardly hear of it from anybody else between the Bar Charentais and your *loge*. . . *A bientôt!*" And the Irishman left her.

Before she could arrange in her mind the mere facts of

the last few minutes, the racket of the call boy was in the the hall summoning her to St. Bartholomew's massacre.

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THE following morning, as Helma in her ruffled cap sat bolstered up in bed while Raymond bustled about preparing coffee, her brain was busy with the surprising occurrences of the previous day, and the unexplained condition laid down by John O'Brien for the coming conference at the Univers. The best device as regards Raymond, she thought, would be simply to ask him to stay away. . .

"Come here a moment, *chéri.* I've got some quite wonderful news for you."

Raymond came over and stood beside the bed, all attention. She told him about Roger's coming down to Tours, and his decision to revive "Les Huguenots" at the Paris Opéra in May with O'Brien and herself.

"I didn't say anything to you last evening, and I asked John not to mention it, simply because I needed so much to sleep and didn't want to sit up chattering about it."

Raymond's eyes, as she spoke, grew bigger and bigger, and when she had finished he gave a low whistle. Then, with a half-skip, he returned to his coffee-pot. . . Well, she thought, was that all? . . .

"It surely is great news," he said at last. "You deserve two lumps of sugar and an extra pat of butter in honor of the day."

"So far good," was her mental comment, but the essential thing she had still to make known.

"Now, there's this too, *chéri.* At four o'clock Victoria is giving her farewell tea of the Tours season, and of course we're going, you and I, dressed in our Sunday best. But before that I must have a few minutes alone with Roger and O'Brien in the *salon* of the Univers, when I'm to get my contract. Nobody else can come, not even you. So you'll join me at four sharp *chez* Victoria."

Raymond betrayed not the slightest dissatisfaction with

this arrangement. Presently he brought her a neatly prepared tray, set out with her roll and coffee and the little extras of honor.

"Behold, my fair prima donna," he twinklingly remarked, "how well Madame is served!"

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PROMPTLY at three Helma entered the *salon* of the Univers. O'Brien was already there, fidgeting about the room.

"I want to say, Helma," he began, "I've seen the contract. It's a good one. Roger will be here directly and we'll go over it together. But you needn't hesitate to sign it. This engagement will launch you seriously."

"Really, John, I feel I owe this good fortune to you."

"No, no," the Irishman interrupted her impatiently. He nervously tweaked his cravat and tweaked it again.

"But before Roger comes there's something more I want to say to you, Helma," he burst out, "just a bit of sincere advice from a new friend who's like an old friend. Indeed, I'm going to talk to you like the proverbial Dutch uncle. It's like this: when you go up to Paris for this engagement, you must manage to leave the little *gigolo* behind. I mean Raymond."

Helma felt her color mounting. "He's never taken a *sou* from me," she said stiffly.

"Forgive me the word," O'Brien answered in evident confusion. "It's a bit *grossier*. I didn't just mean that. But it's difficult to explain. Raymond is a nice boy, useful down here, but he wouldn't do at all with you in Paris. Somehow he wouldn't fit into the frame of the Opéra."

A suspicion that Helma could not escape must have shown itself in her expression. O'Brien in his turn flushed.

"Oh, no, it's not that! What I'm saying to you I'm saying with no ulterior motive, just out of my genuine interest in you and your career. There's nothing that you might call personal about it. I mean to say, Raymond would simply be in the way, and he wouldn't be happy either. In

plain English it's just this—if you love the boy enough, by all means marry him. Otherwise he's better back with his people in Bordeaux or Biarritz or wherever it is he comes from. In Paris he'd be entirely out of the picture. I'm sure he's served his purpose down here very well. But that's ended. Remember, Helma you're on the point of becoming a very great woman, a really big figure. A singer in your position, with your talent, does not, to put it plainly, need a lover or a husband at all. You are free; you can live your own life as you choose. But if you *are* going to have a husband or a lover, for heaven's sake have somebody that counts, a man whose fortune or whose worldly position means something. But, of course, as I told you before, if you love Raymond enough, marry him. If you don't—and I don't believe you really do—by taking him back to Paris with you, you'd only handicap yourself and postpone his evil day, for he wouldn't last. . . There, I've said my say, and I've only said it because I know you're a stranger in a strange land; two strange lands in fact—the land of opera and the land of France. I'm no preacher of morals. It may all sound very curious to you. But there's wisdom in what I'm telling you, and a lot of experience of life."

It all seemed to be turning over in her mind, as she had seen a millwheel turn over and over, mechanically, in its stream. It would perhaps mean something later, but not now. . . They sat there silent until, quite unannounced, Roger appeared.

A prosperous, well-groomed fellow, of middle height and middle girth and middle age, dressed in an irreproachable morning suit, adorned with a white *boutonnière*, he looked to perfection the rich city merchant that he had been before "patronage of the arts" brought him the directorship of the Paris Opéra—to the eye, a smarter, more personable, more successful Perret. Helma and O'Brien had risen. Roger greeted the tenor with a hearty *camaraderie*, bent over Helma's hand and kissed it, and then entered on a formal-sounding speech in which he likened her to the great Fal-

con and dwelt on the pride he would have in welcoming her to membership in the company which that historic singer had so eminently graced. Whereupon he produced the contract, and the three of them proceeded to scan its terms. To Helma they seemed fair enough and the canny O'Brien already had given his endorsement; so her consent was only a matter of routine.

The business of the day thus disposed of, they went up together to the suite occupied by la Reine Victoria for the last general gathering of the company that had made the season at Tours a subject of so much more than local comment and discussion. . .

"We'll go for a walk," Helma whispered to Raymond when the ceremonious adieux to the illustrious Roger were over.

Arm in arm they stepped briskly down the rue Nationale in the bracing March evening. There were crowds in the street. The lighted windows of the shops beckoned to customers, the cafés were merry for the hour of the *apéritif*, the whole place looked prosperous and gay; a rich provincial city rejoicing in the abundance of its life. But Helma went through it all unnoticing. Her career, the words of O'Brien and of Roger, the certainty that at last the goal her life had moved toward was at hand, chanted their deep symphonic song in all her being. But above the consonance of its harmonies sounded one little theme discordant—Raymond. She who had always been honest with herself, even when without remorse she had stood in the swamp which her Puritan forebears had denominated mortal sin, now had the skulking feeling of being party to an unworthy action. Here she was, walking arm in arm with Raymond, as they had walked together all these months, and at the same time stealthily playing with the idea of excluding him from her life forever within the next thirty-six hours.

They crossed the Place des Arts, passed the statues of Rabelais and Descartes, and were out on the long stone bridge. Midway to St. Symphorien Helma halted their swift march,

and together they leaned upon the western parapet and looked down into the turbulent waters of the Loire, high and imposing now in springtime plenitude. Here was the river plunging its way to the ocean; here were they, two human waifs, suspended between the unrelenting current and the cloud-blown sky. Raymond, no less than Dubosc, had once been her salvation and afterwards, through all this crucial season at Tours, her devoted *camarade* and aid; yet in every nerve and sinew she knew, little as she wanted to, that John O'Brien was right. She, Helma Seymour, and the career of Helma Seymour, were done with Raymond. As O'Brien bluntly had put it, he had served his purpose.

She wished she could speak and have it over then and there. But Raymond gazing into the water looked disconcertingly like a small boy cogitating a fishing expedition, utterly out of the tragic rhythm of the hour, and she couldn't risk turning the solemn theme of separation into farce.

She drew in deeply the sharp air that swept down the wide valley of the Loire.

"I don't know exactly why, Raymond," she said, "but all this business, Roger and the tea and everything, has made me nervous. I *must* have gaiety to-night. Let's hurry back and find O'Brien and make him give *us* a grand farewell dinner, only us three, and we'll eat and drink and sing and dance and forget! What do you say?"

Raymond lifted his head from his studious contemplation of the river and looked at her roguishly. But behind and beneath the roguery she detected something serious.

"I should think *you'd* be very glad to remember," and, despite his bantering tone, every word had an edge.

It flashed into her mind that she might seize this moment to speak out. But she knew at once that there was just the transient opposition between them which, if she were to say it now, might flame to bitterness and recrimination. . . No, this was not the moment.

"Sometimes forgetting is remembering," she replied in purposeful evasion. "But come on!" she added with de-

liberate vivacity. "If we loiter here, we'll not find John!" Consciously she was playing for time.

"All right," Raymond agreed.

They found the tenor at the Bar Charentais, joking over his *apéritif* with the *patron.*

"Oh, John," cried Helma, rushing up to him, "*pour l'amour de Dieu,* have us to dinner with you to-night! I'm just worn out from the strain of everything. I've *got* to play! Let's have a regular gala all our own, you and Raymond and I!"

Apparently nothing could have pleased the Irishman better. If he thought this manifestation the least bit strange after his conversation with Helma in the *salon* at the Univers, he gave no sign. By way of launching the gala properly he immediately ordered a round of *portos blancs.*

CHAPTER IX

Helma was awake the next morning with the dawn. In the first chill light she saw Raymond's face on the adjoining pillow. As he slept she looked at him long and earnestly. The fabricated gaiety of the evening had left her. Her mind was full of the thing that she could define only as her treason. He had served her in perfect trust, without stint or question, and he had loved her well, the lad. To dismiss him now would be like stabbing him in his sleep. . .

Time passed and day came fully, but all her thinking brought no solution. The one expedient that she could not now envisage was telling him the plain truth. And what possible excuse could she invent that he would believe?

In utter weariness of unprofitable thought, she determined at last to let things take their course. Raymond deserved from her nothing but the most considerate treatment. What if there no longer was in her feeling for him the romantic lift that had borne her as on magic wings to the glorious adventure of Tours? She had won out, won out beyond her fondest dream; and *he* had helped her. And never by

word or deed had there been so much as a hint of anything but unwavering devotion to her and her welfare. Obviously he had enjoyed the adventure almost as much as she, but how easily another youth might have become puffed up with her success, taken all credit of it to himself, assumed proprietary airs, plotted immediate matrimony, or at least the perpetuation of their irregular union in a way that should give him ample material benefits! In a word, Raymond might have turned out to be exactly the little *gigolo* that O'Brien carelessly had called him. She realized now what risks she in her self-absorption had been running with him all along. But the fact was, he had been toward her the soul of candor and of honor.

No; Raymond should stay if he chose. And the choice should be absolutely free. He hadn't dropped a word as to the possibility of his not going to Paris with her, nor would she. Besides, she was still fond of him, and he might, despite the gloomy prognostications of O'Brien, fit into the frame of Paris as perfectly as he had fitted into that of Tours. . . So far as she was concerned, the thing should be allowed to settle itself. That was the only right way, and she relaxed as for more sleep.

But chance, Helma was never to forget, entered her life this critical morning as she, after weighing every element, might really have desired. A sharp knocking recalled her to the immediate present. Raymond opened his eyes sleepily, spoke a gruff, half-articulate word, and, scarcely awake, plumped out of bed and to the door. It was the postman with a registered letter for Monsieur Retz. He signed for it, and then, leaning against the window-frame, tore it open and hastily glanced it over. Whereupon he folded it again, stuck it in the pocket of his pajamas, and, with a "Don't you disturb yourself; I'll make the coffee," began stoking the fire and preparing their morning repast. But, as he worked, he was oddly silent.

"I think, Helma," he broke out with seeming irrelevance, "you'll need another trunk for Paris. They're having a

sale in the rue Nationale and I'll get one there this morning. Then we can do the important packing before tea, and the rest of the time we're here we shall be free to run around as we like."

She answered something in assent that sounded to herself singularly cheerless, though she tried to make her tone bright and casual.

Raymond, giving her tray a final touch, brought it over and set it down on the bed beside her. Then he went back to the window and looked out idly.

"You know," he said without turning around, "I think to-morrow afternoon I'll take the express to Bordeaux which leaves St. Pierre-des-Corps just after your train leaves for Paris. Then I can be here to put you on board."

Helma could scarcely trust her ears at this totally unexpected utterance. With Raymond's back turned to her, it was easier to summon a slightly interrogative "Yes?" But working within her were emotions that must not show any outward sign.

"Yes," he echoed her, still facing the window, "and suppose we don't bother with the shuttle-train. That's all right to carry trunks. But you and I'll take the handbags with us and drive over to St. Pierre-des-Corps as befits our exalted rank."

She noticed that, in spite of the bravado of his words, there was little cheer in his tone either. He lighted a cigarette, sat down in the armchair, and went on in a hesitant, constrained way, his eyes roving vacantly here and there:

"My stepmother writes me that my father is not well, a *surménage*, and that he really must have a rest. There's nobody but myself to look after the business for him. Emile, as you know, is at Nancy studying law. So I think there's nothing for me to do but to go home. Besides, your affairs are all well arranged. You won't need me in Paris."

She could divine a conflict going on in him—something like her own, maybe,—but she did not want to understand it too precisely.

"Yes, I think you're right. Undoubtedly that would be best." She had to give him some answer, and she tried to convey in this simple statement of belief the deliberative wisdom of a judge on the bench. But she nevertheless knew she was making a sorry job of it.

Raymond, however, seemed to have no ear for what she was saying. He got up nervously and stepped over to the stove.

"I had almost forgotten my own cup of coffee," he declared. . .

Helma never saw the contents of that registered letter, and she had then and always a suspicion that it might not have been exactly as Raymond had set it forth. She even suspected that somehow he had guessed the way things were going and then contrived this method of sparing them both embarrassment.

But when, just before tea, they walked over to the town station, she to buy her first-class ticket for Paris, he his second-class for Bordeaux *en route* to Biarritz, she knew that the solution was sure. With so much certain and the sense of freedom that it carried, came a return wave of her old affection. These hours, in any case, were their last together at Tours, and for so short a span the *diva* of to-morrow could afford to-day to turn the leaf back.

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They stood together on the station platform at St. Pierre-des-Corps. Northward, under a dun sky, stretched the city they were leaving. Other members of the troupe were there, bound for Paris. Porters shifted luggage noisily. Presently her train must start.

Obedient to an unspoken impulse they walked away from the crowd, far up the platform, as far as they dared go. John O'Brien came charging after them. "My man will look out for your traps, Helma," he said. "I've reserved a compartment for you, Victoria, that baritone fellow Santini, and myself. . . Yes, Victoria's going up to Paris, but not to

sing there, you may be sure. She's going to get some clothes. . . Don't you concern yourself about anything any more. I'll see to everything."

O'Brien stepped down the platform a discreet distance and planted himself, back toward them, towering in his fur great-coat like a giant watch-dog, on guard. . .

There they stood, Helma and Raymond, listening for the signal that should start the train. All had been said; there was nothing left but the act of parting, for which they waited in a monotony of supense. At length a shrill pipe sounded from the distant engine, and then began a slamming of doors and the approaching cry of the guard: *"En voiture!"*

In a final burst of tenderness Helma placed her arms about Raymond's neck and their lips met.

"Write me in care of the Opéra. That will be sure to reach me." In spite of herself she was speaking hoarsely.

Raymond gave the briefest of nods. He hopped to the running-board of the nearest carriage and lifted her up the long step. Then he hopped down and stood hat in hand, a set smile on his face, waving a sort of farewell. Helma kissed her fingers to him and tried hard to smile back. As the train began to move, she turned abruptly away and hurried through the carriages to find the compartment where O'Brien and the rest were expecting her.

The big tenor was busily helping his man to fit the various bags and boxes into the racks. The other singers still stood in the corridor. O'Brien, without a word, pointed out to Helma her place by the window on the opposite side of the compartment. The train was already in the patch of woods between St. Pierre-des-Corps and the bridge over the Loire.

Helma rested her head against the window-pane. Her eyes were smarting with tears. The train, whistling sharply, sped toward the bridge. As it emerged from the trees, the low clouds yielded, and a flood of sunset-light poured up the valley, covering gray Tours, distant now, beside the river-bank, with a roseate glory. The cathedral, reared above the town, seemed grown to twice its size; the domed towers

dripped gold. . . It was *their* city, *their* church, and the wonder of it enveloped her and seized her heart.

As the train roared out on the long bridge, the cloud-door closed and dusk settled over the scene. O'Brien was giving last pokes and shoves to the luggage. Victoria and Santini bustled into the compartment to take their places. Helma leaned back and shut her eyes, ignoring the turbid sweep of the river. Still she saw Tours as in an apocalyptic vision. And, deep within her soul, she knew that something which could happen to her only once had ended. Brief as it was, man-measured, that had been *her* interlude in paradise.

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